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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 380. FOR WEEK ENDING APRIL 11TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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U can't S-tim-8 the good F-ects that M-N-8 from a regular use of ... BEECHAM'S PILLS.

It is X-asper-8-ting in the L-M-N-tary stage of indigestion 2 find U R without ... ... BEECHAM'S PILLS.

When stomachic pains W up, there's 0 can X-L an M-E-D-8 course of BEECHAM'S PILLS.

If I C P-ple J-ded and nervous I soon make them C-rene and G-nial with ... ... BEECHAM'S PILLS.

If U R troubled with an X-S of Bile, there's no Rem-E-D so X-P-D-ent or cer-10 as... ... ... BEECHAM'S PILLS.

If U R a Y-T-brown colour O-N to liver complaint, U 0 2 S-A to take a course of ... ... BEECHAM'S PILLS.

E-rad-E-K-8 Biliousness and O-D-S Flat-U-os-E-T by Y-s courses of BEECHAM'S PILLS.

In keeping up an X-U-B-rance of spirits U can't B Y Y, there-4 U R asked to take ... ... BEECHAM'S PILLS.

If U don't wish to D-V-8 from Lth U 0 cer-10-ly, B-4 an X-E-jen-C occurs, 2 try ... ... BEECHAM'S PILLS.

By O-B-D-ence 2 instructions, your ailments will B taken B-4 by the op-R-A-tions of... ... ... BEECHAM'S PILLS.

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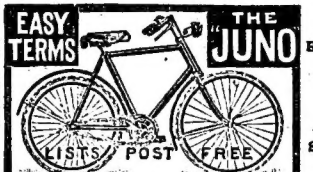

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SHORT STORIES

DIANA.

Straight as an Indian arrow, large-limbed and tall, with that peculiar white skin which does not tan nor grow sallow: the first Diana was not more superbly made than this one. A combination of masculine strength and feminine beauty—not feminine enough to be wholly woman, nor masculine enough to be wholly man. Her dress was half one and half the other. A man's black slouch hat covered her head, and a man's black coat protected her shoulders; a petticoat of thick, dark stuff hid the rest of her graceful form down to the ankles of her boot-shod feet.

She rode a huge black stallion, a creature as splendid and fiery and scornful as the woman that fearlessly bestrode his back.

She was Diana; the horse's name was "Satan." Diana loved Satan and Satan loved Diana. It was said that neither of them loved any other living thing, and certainly no other living thing loved either of them.

Diana pulled the rein and Satan stopped with one forefoot uplifted. They looked like an ebony-statued Centaur. Before them the sun was setting—sinking—sliding down a little and a little into the farthermost edge of the plain.

The halo of the sky slipped down to the earth and spread over the hot ground and the brown dead clover. It crept to the feet of the Centaur, and over its black glossy hide, and stole into the face of the woman. The scorn, the defiance faded out of it and softened the hard lines of masculine force, the Centaur was transfigured.

A broad-branched oak—the only tree for miles round—stood near; a man, close followed by a sheep dog, stepped from behind. He made no noise and was not seen. He was sunburnt, and unshorn, and roughly dressed. There was an odd twitching of the muscles about his mouth, and as he watched the process of transformation in the woman's face, its spirit leapt into his own.

He reached forth his hands and cried out, "Diana."

Was it the reflection of the sunset in her cheeks, or simply returning animation, or did she hear?

She touched the rein and Satan bounded forward, the ebony Centaur was a passive transfiguration no longer. It was again the splendid, scornful defiant creature, hating humanity and smiting the earth with contemptuous feet.

The man with the sheep dog looked after her a little while, then walked slowly away, taking an opposite direction.

A voice, both jest and jeer, struck his ears.

"See, Bill, looks as if he was walkin' home in the shadow of his coffin, and Shep sneeks along as though he had been stealing sheep."

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The man to whom the words were addressed looked out, then dropped his eyes and answered in a lower tone and softer voice than the other: "Don't joke him to-night, Brassy, he's in one of his bad ways. I wouldn't wonder if he'd seen that woman again. It's enough to make one think she's a ghost haunting him the way he looks after he's seen her."

An hour later the moon was full, and the men sat outside the cabin, two of them taking their after-supper smoke. The mysterious calm of the breezeless night had put upon them its spell of silence. Bill sat with bowed head, and whittled mechanically on a small piece of wood, while Dainty held a cigarette caressingly between his thumb and forefinger, and blew contented little puffs of smoke away from his mouth. Brassy tugged and puffed at an old pipe, and watched Bill from under the rim of his hat.

Suddenly, Dainty jumped up and threw away his cigarette. "Boys," said he, "let's take the dogs over to the river and tree a wild-cat."

Brassy pocketed his pipe immediately. "Right, me lord, I'm yours, when it's wild-cats you talk. And if Bill wants to go, the triumvirate's agreed; if he don't—

> "He may sigh to the winds, to the Goddess Diana,
> But his days they will end on the isle of St. Helena!"

He sang the lines of the old-fashioned, long-out-of-date song in harsh, unmusical voice, and it might have been the melody that made Bill start so suddenly that he overturned the stool on which he sat; it might have been the moonlight that made him pale.

An hour, two hours, three, of tramping, and not a wild cat was amiable enough to tree and be killed. Tired out, they started home.

"Listen, don't you hear a curious sound?" said Dainty. They stopped and listened, but only for a moment.

"Merciful God!" shouted Brassy, "run for your lives, it's King's River overflowing!"

They sprang forward and ran swiftly in spite of brush, and briars, and many stumblings. "If we could only get to the slough first," panted Brassy.

The dry bed of the slough was only a few hundred feet beyond, but a wall of water higher than their heads was rolling down with terrible swiftness upon them. The water from the river overtook them and lapped round their feet and up to their waists. It was useless now to try to reach the slough, impossible to cross it if they could; that crackling muffled roar was too near. They were between two floods; it was a moment to act

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without deciding. With one accord Bill and Brassy caught Dainty and hoisted him into the forks of a large sapling, by the side of which they had stopped, and scudded up after him. A minute later they were in the midst of a mile-wide waste of fast-rising water. Behind them was the terrible, swift, rolling river, whose head was in the heart of eternal snows; before them the slough, over which they had walked dry-footed three hours before, rolled another river, swift flowing, muddy, ice-cold, and deadly deep. The sapling swayed and bent with their weight, sometimes dipping them into the chilling water, and shook and shivered to its topmost twig when some floating object struck against it.

Higher rose the flood and swathed their soaked garments about them; it was cold—bitingly cold—and the night was so balmy and warm, and the moonlight soft and beautiful.

"Partners," said Dainty very gently, "if I don't get out of this, and you do, divide my sheep between you. There's none akin to me, nobody in the world to shed for me if I die.

"I feel, somehow, that it will be that way—you two will get out, and I won't."

"And I feel, somehow, that nary one of us ever did sich a mean trick, and we ain't going to commence now."

Dainty smiled a faint little smile, like a pleased child. The moon went down at last and left them in the twilight of the dawn.

Still the water rose, and still they clung closer to the sapling, Bill holding on as tightly as either of the others.

In sheer weariness of living we may cry out for death to come, but when it comes to us and looks square in our faces, we would rather it waited a little longer; not much longer, maybe—perhaps only until we have accomplished one other thing that we would not leave undone—but surely a little longer.

When the first red streak of day shot down into the mountain mists and glowed through the clear atmosphere of the plains, only from shoulders up were the men above the water.

And then everything on the plains before them was lighted up and transformed by the peculiar mirage which was one of the characteristics of the region. Objects, which a moment before would have been indiscernible with magnifying aid, stood out clear and distinct to the naked eye and with a nearness that was startling. The huts of the scattering sheep camps were a city of palaces in air, streeted like Venice, with water, and surrounded with gardens and trees.

The hut, which stood half a mile directly beyond their camp, was standing on the top of theirs with inverted roof. The sheep walked on stilts, and the legs of the cattle and horses were twenty feet long at least. Bill watched it with an interested, studying expression in his eyes. "I doubt," said he, "if there is another place where these peculiar phenomena of mirage appear." It was the first that either of them had spoken for more than an hour.

"I've been figuring a little, mentally," he went on, "on the water question, and, according to my reckoning, we have about thirty-five minutes before the muddy stuff gets into our nostrils."

Brassy made a grimace at this information, and Dainty closed his eyes and whispered: "Dear God, Thy will be done." His face was purple—spotted with cold.

For another five minutes there was silence; then Brassy started so perceptibly that the sapling trembled and made ripples about their necks.

In a terrified whisper, he repeated the words from Revelations: "'And when he had opened the third seal I heard the third voice say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo! a black horse, and he that sat upon him had a pair of balances in his hand.' And I see the black horse and the rider with the balances; look straight ahead of your eyes, and see them yourself."

They both looked as directed, and beheld a most singular phenomenon. Fifteen or twenty feet above the ground, like a black cameo set in air, startlingly distinct was a giant black horse and a black rider, with something in his hand. It was headed towards the river and in the attitude of a long swinging lope.

As instantly as the mirage had appeared as instantly it vanished. Quicker than the wink of an eye the city of palaces dissolved into the huts of the scattering sheep-camps, the sheep were brown ants running over the plain, and the colossal phantom of the air a moving black dot on the earth. The faces of both Bill and Dainty suddenly paled. One thought he had seen into the unseen world, the other knew he had not.

Brassy and Dainty kept their eyes strained upon the horse; Bill kept his as resolutely away; yet he knew as surely as they, that it was coming towards them, and very fast. Once the horse stopped, and the rider swept the river border with a field-glass, pocketed it again, and came on faster than before. Above the roar of the water they could hear the clattering ring of the hoofs as they sent the dust and clods flying from the brown earth.

At last, with sweat-wet flanks and foam-speckled mouth, Satan stopped short on the high bank of the slough, and Diana, shading her eyes with her right hand was looking straight at the faces in the water.

Brassy tried to wave his hand and give a shout, but only succeeded in making a little gurgling noise in the water, Dainty murmured: "Thank God!" Bill's face turned a chalky grey. He made no other sign. Diana took in with one swift, surveying glance, the terrible situation of the men—the dangerous, floating *débris* lodging against the tops of the undergrowth beneath the water, and the treacherous slough at her feet—then dashed away up the stream.

Dainty looked at her with a sort of helpless resignation. Brassy heaved a great sigh. "I wish she hadn't gone; it's no use, she never can get help here in time to do us any good. By Heavens! she's coming to us, God bless her!"

"God save her," said Dainty.

A hundred yards or so above them, Diana was hastily throwing off her boots and heaviest outer garments; taking the bridle from the horse's ears, she slipped it down over his nose and flung it on the ground by the garments, and, sticking her heels into his flanks with the *abandon* of a vaquero, tried to rush him over the river bank. He snorted and reared up on his hind feet, standing so straight that Diana had to clasp her arms round his neck to keep from sliding off behind. He was a wonderfully trained animal, and he never before refused to obey Diana—the river terrified him out of his training and loyalty. Again she tried to rush him over, and again he plunged and reared; snorting with terror, he whirled his huge body round and headed away from the river.

Diana wore a large silk handkerchief round her neck; this she untied and twisted about his nose for a rein; then whirled round and came dashing back at full

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speed. Just at the river bank she leant forward and shouted to him something in a foreign tongue, and over they went horse and woman into the flood, and sank in it out of sight. The men watching forgot their own peril.

"Father in Heaven, save her!" whispered Dainty. It was but a moment until they rose to the surface, and struck out diagonally across the current, straight towards the heads in the water. The long black hair of the woman had tumbled down to her waist, and made a black cloak for her wet white shoulders. Her arms, reached forward to guide the horse, shone ivory white in the new-born sunbeams; a Nereid guiding her sea-horse back to the sea.

Diana guided Satan by patting the sides of his face, first with one hand, then with the other, caressing his neck with her bare, perfect arms, and talking coaxingly, encouragingly to him, all the time keeping his nose pointed directly towards the heads.

Nearer and nearer—she is within speaking distance—"Billy," the voice was strangely sweet, and soft, and rich, commingling like a prayer and a command, "when we get even with you pull yourself on behind me." He caught the back of the saddle, and with much difficulty pulled himself upon the horse as the strangely sweet voice had bidden him; no other word was spoken. The horse sank a little deeper and struggled a little harder to swim with his doubled burden.

At a point considerably below them the high bank flattened out and the water ran over, making a sort of swamp; to this Diana steered. The moment they touched land Bill slipped to the ground as quickly as his numbed limbs would let him. Diana handed him a small flask of brandy, which she took from a pocket in her queerly fashioned toilet. Their hands touched as he took it, and one instant their eyes looked into each other's.

A momentary blush spread over both faces, leaving them whiter by contrast.

She started Satan back up the slough, and Bill stood grasping the litttle silver flask, with hands too shaky to get it to his mouth. Was it the cold numbness that made him tremble so? He was a very steady-nerved man, but he was very cold. The numbness and the trembling got into his brain now, and a ringing in his ears, and from some far-off land, in some far-off time he heard a voice—his or some other's—saying: "We will neither speak to the other, nor of the other, till one of us is dead."

This time the horse made no resistance, but leapt over the bank and struck bravely out into the current. Diana guided him carefully as before, and her face was as pale and as set, but the illumination of a heroic resolve had faded out of it, leaving only the patience of self-imposed duty. Relieved of Bill's weight the sapling slightly raised, and the shoulders of Brassy and Dainty were above water. Eagerly they watched the approaching Nereid; she was bringing them deliverance or more sudden death. Once the horse swerved in his course, and once the brush of a floating limb left a long red scratch on Diana's arm, when she pushed it out of their way.

"Brassy will come next; the tree will hold up the lighter man the longest," the voice might have come from the mouth of a sphinx so hard and lifelessly calm it was.

Thus it was in spite of Brassy's assertions that both of Dainty's partners went out and left him.

Brassy was landed safely by the side of Bill, who apparently had not moved a step. He still held the silver flask, but he did not look into Diana's face, nor did she into his. When she started back on the third perilous venture, he heard again, in the ringing of his ears, the voice from that far-away time: "We will neither of us speak to the other, nor of the other, till one of us is dead."

Again the brave horse leapt over into the cold, still-rising flood, and horse and rider again went out of sight. They were longer coming up this time, and made the way slower and with much greater effort. Satan was tired and Diana too. She did not speak when nearing Dainty, to tell him to get on behind her, only motioned that he should, with a wave of her hand. When they were safely started homewards Brassy could not forbear a glad shout, and flung out his draggle-sleeved arms with a joyous "Hooray!"

In the swiftest current, not more than thirty yards from the shore, all at once the horse stopped swimming and they went down, so suddenly that Bill and Brassy rubbed their eyes, thinking their senses must have cheated them. Drowning people rise three times to the surface; these did not come up at all. Once Dainty's hand pushed through the water. Bill started to it, Brassy held him back.

"Don't, Bill, it's no use," he said.

Bill fought to get free, and in the scuffle both came near falling into the slough.

Presently Bill's hands dragged limply to his sides. "You're right, it's no use; go for help, I'll stay and watch for them."

Many hours afterwards, men came with a boat, and grappling-hooks, but not until the flood abated were the bodies found.

Dainty was hauled out first; when Brassy saw him a queer little cry escaped him. He took his partner's head in his hands, and the tears ran streaming down his cheeks; it was the first time in his life that he could not speak. Diana was brought out next, and laid on the hot sand by the side of Dainty. The water had washed her hair down on each side of her head, crossed it under her chin, and swathed it round her neck, making a dripping black frame for her face. Thou art a mighty artist, Death!

Bill stood silently looking down upon her; suddenly a trembling seized him, like a dumb animal that has struck a blow over its brain.

Out of that far-off life he heard his own voice saying: "We will neither of us speak to the other, nor of the other, till one of us is dead."

"Diana, Diana!" the words were a pitying cry, hoarse and full of pain; perhaps none but the dead heard. The men were very busy.

The bodies were buried on a large knoll, not far from the spot, where they were dragged from the river. At the head of Diana's grave Bill put up a redwood cross on which he carved with his knife, and stained the letters red, "Diana." And under the lonely name these lines:

> In every form of the human
> Some hint of the highest dwells.

It was all over at last, except the nightmare horror of it; and Bill and Brassy again sat out in the moonlight by their cabin. Bill leant against the wall. Brassy wrestled with the old pipe until he could not any longer endure the silence, and blurted out his thought. "I wonder what made her do it."

Slowly Bill answered: "She used to be my wife."

Madge Morris.

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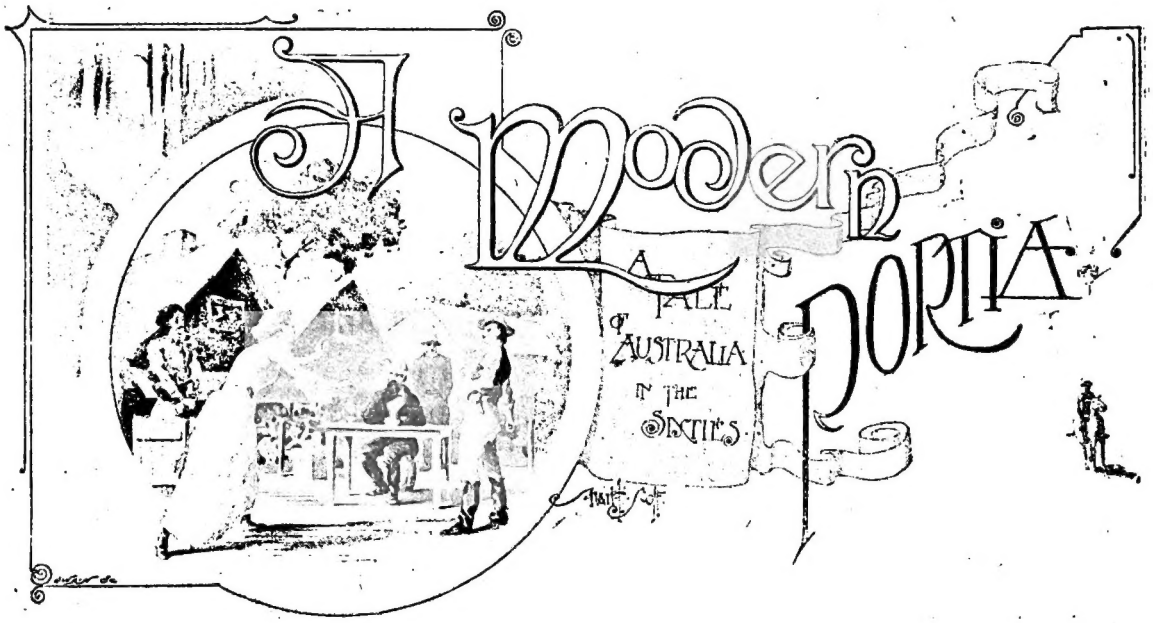

It fell upon him as a bolt from the blue. Never had such a contingency entered his mind. So remote was the probability of comparative poverty, that the knowledge of his father's failure to avert long-impending ruin, and of that father's cowardice, fear to face the future, inability to cope with his enormous financial difficulties, and want of the stamina and courage necessary to undertake the rebuilding of the wreck of his shattered fortune, came upon young Harry Sanderson with a crash. For a little while he was as one dazed. The thunder of the revelation dinned in his ears, shutting out the power of thought. And scarcely had he understood its full import to himself and his own future career, before the second bolt struck him—his father, knowing that the ultimate result would inevitably be irretrievable ruin, had shot himself.

The son of the once great London merchant found himself professionless, untrained for any work suitable to his refined tastes, a poor man! As a boy he had been brought up amidst luxurious surroundings. He had ever been a dutiful son to his parents, but no work had ever been expected of him, and his frank, genial nature had won him many friends. Nevertheless, he was not the sort of man to ask assistance of the latter. Nothing lay open to him save emigration; and, but for his mother, who merely retained a paltry sum of eight hundred pounds, and whom he felt bound—although he knew not how—to support, he would have taken this step, shipped to Australia, and sought a living there.

But a week after his father's death, that mother whom he loved so well lay on her death-bed. After bidding him fight his way in the world, never despairing, never fainting by the way, but always looking forward to the goal of success, she smiled up at him through her tears. He imprinted a long kiss upon the already chill forehead, and her gentle spirit passed away from its earthly tenement. The third bolt had struck him.

He fell upon his knees beside the bed, in mute agony. He was alone in very truth now.

After seeing her laid to rest in a laurel-covered grave, in the churchyard at Brocklau, the country seat which once he expected to inherit, he realised his effects—bringing him in a sum of between eight and nine hundred pounds—and booked a passage to Australia, the country where gold and sunshine were reported to be equally plentiful; and a few weeks later he sailed in a crowded ship.

* * * * *

Harry Sanderson arrived in Melbourne after an uneventful voyage. For a fortnight he knocked about the then rising township, undecided as to where to proceed. The gold boom was at its height, and upon falling in with an old miner who had made his "pile," he soon decided upon his course of action. From this man he purchased a complete turn-out, consisting of a cart, a couple of horses, tents, tools, cooking utensils, and all that comprises a miner's swag, at a very low price—in addition to a considerable quantity of excellent advice, which the good-natured miner threw in—and started upon his tedious journey, along the rough, beaten track, to the goldfields.

The first night he camped at a creek, where he saw two tents had already been erected. He was surprised, later, to see that they were occupied by a man and a little girl, apparently father and daughter. He saw the pair casting glances of envy upon his comfortable turn-out, and noted how hungrily their eyes wandered towards the fire that he had kindled, whereon he was grilling a steak, the aroma from which was borne in their direction upon the warm evening air. Partly out of compassion, and partly from a sense of loneliness, he stepped forward and asked them to join him in his meal.

They readily accepted the invitation. After the viands had been discussed, the stranger acquainted Harry Sanderson with the last chapter of his life. He was in very low water, he said, at the present time; he was a well-connected man, and had been in a large way of business in Sydney, when a ship in which he had placed the bulk of his capital, went down; and his creditors, pouncing down upon him, had turned him out with but a few shillings in his possession. His wife was dead, and he had not a friend in the world with

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whom he could leave his child, consequently he was forced to take the little one with him. They had walked from Melbourne, his last coin going in passage money from Sydney, and they had to subsequently depend for food upon the generosity of the travellers they met.

Harry Sanderson never doubted the plausibility of this story; but sat, with his legs crossed, puffing the smoke from his briarwood pipe, listening with the deepest attention. The man, whose name was Wilson, had certainly interested him not a little by the recital of his troubles, but the girl—whose age could not have been more than twelve years—with her sunburnt, pretty face, surrounded by a wealth of clustering curls, and her large, blue, beautiful eyes, and red, parted lips, revealing a row of little teeth, most regular and of pearly whiteness, attracted him in some subtle manner which he could not explain satisfactorily even to himself.

At the conclusion of her father's story she spoke out, without a trace of nervousness, and also without a trace of affectation.

"You see, sir," said she, "father is not very strong; and, as I am strong and able, I came with him, in order to help him and look after him. I know, because I am only a girl, I shall be laughed at up at the diggings," she shook her curls, and her eyes danced as she went on, "but I don't care, I'm going to stick to my father."

"You're a very plucky little girl," said Sanderson. But his heart grew cold at the thought of all the evil that this sweet, innocent child would see and hear at the goldfields. She was far too pure and sweet a flower to blossom in such a devilish atmosphere.

She looked up into Sanderson's face in such an appealing manner that his heart went out to her on the spot, and he determined to watch over her with a brother's care.

"You — you will look after my father, *sometimes?*" she asked. "You are well and strong, and I can see by your face that you are kind."

Something suspiciously like a tear shone in either eye, as, nodding to the child, Sanderson turned to her father. "Mr. Wilson, I can sympathise with you; I too have gone through some trouble, but—as regards money—I am not quite so badly off as you are, and if you'll just allow me to offer you and your daughter a lift and food for the remainder of your journey, I shall be delighted," he said, in his genial way.

David Wilson protested in a half-hearted manner, but consented eventually, as he said, for his daughter's sake. He sprang to his feet and striking his fist upon the stump of a felled tree, he swore that one day he would repay the kindness of the "new chum."

But Sanderson considered himself amply repaid by the company of the child. Her bright eyes were ever shining, her light laugh was ever rippling, and her merry tongue was ever going; so that the journey to the diggings was no longer a jolting drive over a rough, scarce discernable track, but was as a pleasure party, too soon to be broken up, in the estimation of Harry Sanderson.

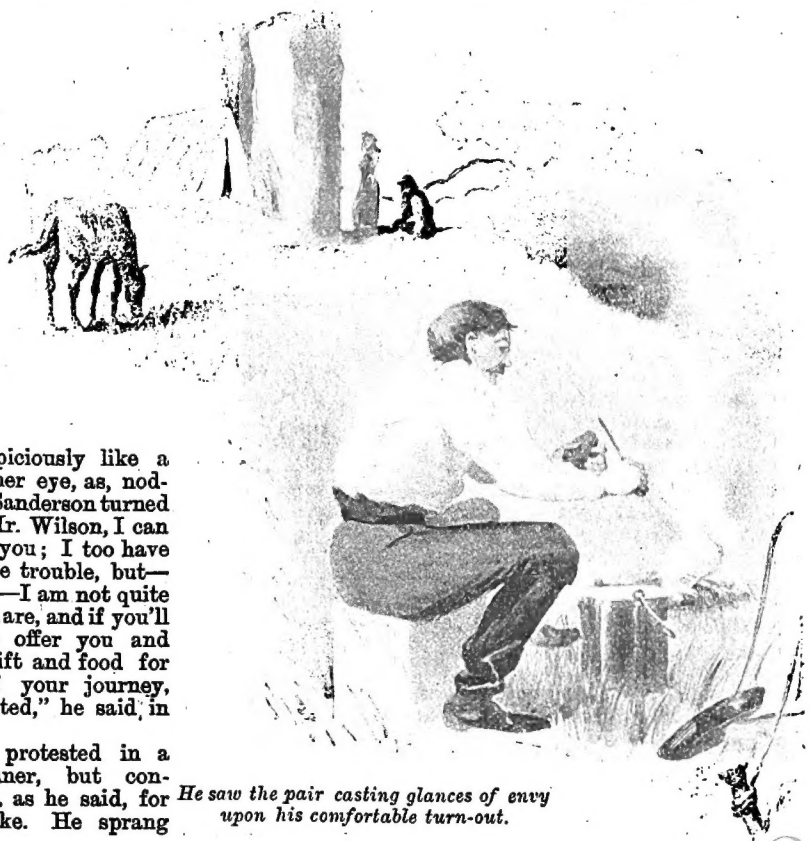
Whilst journeying, Wilson told his companion that he had had considerable experience in gold mining, and to equalise matters and show some return, he suggested that they should enter into partnership, a suggestion that was readily agreed to by Sanderson, and on their arrival at Chamber's Flat, their destination, they pegged out adjoining claims, and erected their tents side by side.

* * * * *

For two years they worked their claims with varying results, but they never found the rich reefs for which they so sanguinely hoped. So by Wilson's advice it was resolved that they should strike their tents and travel farther, and for yet another two years they worked with the same results, in different fields. Then they took to prospecting and exploring a thick belt of country, and eventually discovered the gully, now known as Wilson's Gully.

There was much jubilation at this long awaited turn of affairs. Eva, Wilson's daughter, now grown to womanhood, was especially delighted and enthusiastic, and Harry Sanderson gazed with a vague, indescribable longing upon her beautiful, radiant face; but somehow he dared not look into those great blue eyes, for fear that he might not read the answer which he longed for in them.

Gold! Gold! Gold! They had found it in quantities at last. But the feverish desire for gold, for the gold's sake, no longer held possession of Harry Sanderson. It was solely in the hope of winning this daughter of the Australian plains, this flower of the wild, uncultivated country, that he now longed for the possession of golden nuggets.



He saw the pair casting glances of envy upon his comfortable turn-out.

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Leaving his partner in charge of their valuable discoveries, Wilson rode to the nearest township to register his claim and obtain the necessary papers from the warden of the goldfields.

Gold! Gold! Gold! The word seemed to ring out bravely to each step of his cantering horse. Untold gold was in his possession now. All that was needed was work to dig it up. And would he not labour to increase, and ever increase, the wealth that awaited the handling? Gold! Gold! Gold! His brain reeled at the thought. The fever, the terrible thirst for gold, had always been upon him, sapping almost every drop of his better nature; but now his avarice governed him, drove him, held him in a fearful grip that there was no fleeing from. Before, he had possessed *some* mastery over himself, over this lust of gold; but now his power had gone. He was like a puppet in the hands of this terrible greed; his conscience lay in a death-like slumber, he could no longer attempt to struggle against this overwhelming desire for gold, gold, gold.

Great beads of sweat broke out upon his brow as he cantered onwards. Something impelled him to commit a crime for the sake of this gold. He gazed this way and that with hunted, terror-stricken eyes when he drew rein and sought the warden's office.

Instead of taking out the papers in the joint names of himself and Sanderson, as he had agreed to do, he took them out and registered the claim under his own name alone.

It was accomplished. He had committed the crime—and he was safe.

The terror died out of his eyes; his hand scarcely trembled as he thrust the papers into his belt.

He swung himself into the saddle. He could hardly restrain a guffaw of triumph, ere he dug his heavy spurs into his animal's flanks. He started off at a gallop, and raising his long, unkempt beard with one hand, he held before his mouth and laughed into it, loud and long.

Gold! Gold! Gold! Ha, ha! He had got it, got it all now, and the young English swell had no title to the smallest nugget. It was his, *his, his!* Wilson's Gully, only Wilson's!

Sanderson—honest as the broad light of day himself, never suspected treachery in another, and did not ask to see the papers, being fully contented that he was half owner of what was likely to prove a rich mine.

* * * * *

The news of the find soon spread, and a week later a rush had set in, the surrounding country was eagerly pegged out; and, as several other rich claims had been discovered, a township was formed in the gully, and the usual traces of population became apparent.

As some machinery was required to work the mine, Wilson suggested that Sanderson should purchase it with the remainder of his capital. The latter readily consented—it was such a sound investment—and spent the whole of his money in plant and in getting the mine into a fit condition to work it on a large scale.

One night—the machinery being ready, and every prospect of the mine turning out a rich property being assured—Wilson returned from the grog store, which had already found its way into the township, in a semi-drunken condition. His daughter had not prepared his supper, not knowing how late he might be. With an oath he raised his hand as though to strike her. She looked at her father with her large, troubled eyes, and shrank back in fear. In an instant, Harry Sanderson, who was present, sprang to his feet and seized Wilson by the wrist in a vice-like grip.

It was accomplished. He had committed the crime.

"You coward!" he shouted.

"Coward, eh? You dare to call me a coward?" sneered Wilson. "Leave my claim. Leave the gully at once. Go, you upstart, go! Do you hear me? Edge out of it. Do you think that I am going to keep you here always?"

Eva gazed at him in astonishment, her lips parted, her hand pressed tightly to her bosom. "Mr. Sanderson! oh, what does he mean?" she panted.

"He has been drinking," Harry Sanderson made answer reassuringly.

Then he turned to Wilson and looked him full in the face. "You forget that half the claim is mine," he said colly, "and that I paid for the whole of the machinery."

"You lie!" roared Wilson. "You lie, you dog!"

He strode across the hut and unlocked a small trunk in the corner. Snatching up the copy of the register he thrust it into the astonished young man's hands. "Read that! read it! you scoundrel!" he shouted.

Sanderson took it and held it in the flickering lamplight. He read it incredulously. But as he read, the truth dawned upon him. This man had broken faith with him, had lied, had rendered contemptible the name of friend, had returned evil—the blackest, foulest treachery—for good, had robbed him of his share in the claim. His lower jaw fell, he paled to the lips, his eyes filled with wonder and reproach.

"And I was your *friend!*" he said slowly.

"I don't require your friendship," Wilson retorted.

"No. You no longer need it. You have bartered it away." He looked dazedly at Eva, standing trembling, scarce believing the evidence of her own eyes and ears; then he turned to the half-drunken man before him. "But what a price to sell it for," he said bitterly.

Then he moved towards Eva, took the tips of her

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fingers in his strong hand, raised them to his lips, and, turning, strode through the door of the hut, without uttering another word.

He dived into the forest and, coming to a fallen tree, sat down upon the trunk and strove to collect his thoughts, to reason it all out mentally; but his mind seemed to have become a blank, his very memory seemed to have dimmed. So he sat in the dusk, looking vacantly before him, like one who has received a terrific blow upon the temples, stunned, helpless, a mere cypher.

A little later a white figure crossed his line of sight. It was Eva. She was looking for him.

Then the whole truth broke in upon his brain. He had lost his claim; and in losing that, he had lost all hopes of winning her.

He started when he perceived the deathly whiteness of her face as she drew near.

"Mr. Sanderson," she faltered. She essayed to speak further, but a great sob choked her utterance; she dropped her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"Eva, don't cry like that! It makes it all the harder for me to bear." He sprang to his feet and took her by the hand. "I will go away. I will go away. I will not dispute his claim." And, with fast beating heart, he strove to look into the face of the woman he loved better than a world of gold.

"You—you must not go—go—away," she said between her sobs.

"Why should I stay? I am a poor man, poorer than when I first knew you," he retorted in a voice of pain.

"Harry!" she said reproachfully.

He tilted up her chin and looked into her crimsoning face. "Eva, my darling, my love, my life, tell me to stay and ——"

"Stay, Harry," she whispered.

And then the love that had lain smouldering for over five years burst forth at the first sign of trouble, and in the silence of the woods the words were spoken which bound them together for ever, for theirs was the love of a life-time and of eternity.

Later, Sanderson returned again to the mine, and to the hut he helped to build.

Wilson met him, armed with a revolver.

"Are you going to clear out?" he asked, as he fingered the weapon with studied carelessness.

Sanderson looked at him fearlessly. "Yes," he replied, "I'll take my few belongings with me, and go. Since you are the owner of the mine, according to law, I shall not dispute it."

His tones showed neither hatred nor malice. They cut Wilson to the quick and lashed him to fury. He had expected his partner to threaten him or to offer fight, but this reply was quite unlooked for on his part.

He scarcely realised that his daughter—because she was his daughter—had unwittingly saved him from the soundest thrashing a man could have administered to him.

He glared at the man he had wronged. "And another thing, Sanderson, I don't wish your acquaintance with my daughter to continue. You understand what I mean," he said fiercely.

Sanderson made no answer. He gathered together his few belongings and set off for the town in the gully.

Eva watched him departing. Then she turned to her father.

"Have you no conscience? no spark of honour?" she asked in a tone of restrained pain. "How could you be so wicked? He kept us alive—yes, kept us from starvation!—for years. He trusted you, and you have betrayed the trust. Have you no heart at all?"

He strode towards her, an oath upon his lips.

She made no movement, but still faced him, white to the lips, her eyes condemning him.

"To think—only to think—that you are my father—that my father is worse, infinitely worse, than a common thief; for he has taken the part of Judas Iscariot, has betrayed the man who befriended him," she said in bitter irony.

Her words goaded him to fury. "If ever you mention that fellow again in my house, I'll strangle you!" he shouted. "He has put all those —— superfine ideas in your head. Damn him! I say, and damn him! and damn him!"

"He has taught me all I know. He has taught me to look upon all meanness and lying and theft with contempt," she answered.

"And I will teach you that I am master of my own," he shouted brutally, and in another instant his hand was upraised—it fell upon her pale cheek with terrific force!

A woman's scream rent the night air. Eva Wilson lay prone, unconscious, upon the floor of the hut.

A moment later, her father, struck by remorse and terror at what he had done in his ungovernable fury, knelt beside her, calling upon her name.

* * * * *

The surprise in the township was intense, when it became known that young Sanderson, instead of being a partner in the Wilson Hill mine, had only been engaged as a workman; and there was plenty of rough sympathy forthcoming, for Sanderson was popular in his own quiet way. Wilson ridiculed the idea of Sanderson being a partner, and the latter said not a word upon the subject either way. He would have liked to bid the place farewell as he did England when misfortune befel him there, but he had promised Eva that he would stay, and on that account he took a position as assistant in O'Calligan's store.

* * * * *

That hushed stillness so characteristic of the Australian bush was just setting in the fierce, red sun was disappearing, like a ball of fire, below the horizon. It cast its magenta rays upon Wilson's Gully, lighting up the rudely-built houses and huts, the scores of white tents scattered about, and the surrounding forest-covered, rugged hills, into a red, glowing hell.

The township, although far from large in comparison with towns of to-day, had grown considerably since Wilson founded it a year ago. It had come to be considered an important place, both by reason of its gold and its bloodshed, and its gangs of desperadoes.

As was customary, towards evening Wilson's Gully became a species of earthly pandemonium. The drinking shanties and gambling hells were crowded by men of all nations and classes, which, taken as a body, were as debased a set as ever could be found in a township of the size. Scarcely a night passed without some drunken brawl, in which blood was shed, taking place; for law and justice did not yet prevail.

A young man dressed in rough, bush garb, might have been seen hastily leaving a large building, which bore the roughly-painted sign: "J. O'Calligan, Storekeeper." He slammed the door behind him and hurried along the uneven, badly constructed street, until he passed beyond the knot of human habitations.

He directed his steps towards a house of better build than those in the town. It was situated beside Wilson's Hill Mine, on the shoulder of the hill, and surrounded by a dense belt of trees. As he drew near, he left the

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road leading to the house, and plunging into the forest, made his way to a fallen tree, where he halted.

That he was expecting some one was apparent by the eager way in which he scanned a zigzag bridle-path leading from the house.

The man was Harry Sanderson. He had been employed at O'Calligan's store for the past twelve months. He was waiting for Eva Wilson. Her father's mine had even exceeded his expectations, and he was now a wealthy man. He had obtained, and was still obtaining, that gold for which he had sacrificed all honour. He was now looked up to as being the leading man in the township, and his word was law. The hatred which a man invariably displays towards one whom he has wronged burnt like a furnace in his breast towards Harry Sanderson; and he left no stone unturned to throw the cloak of infamy about the shoulders of the latter. Thus it was that his daughter was forced to meet her lover clandestinely, if she met him at all.

The silver rays of the moon shot, spirit-like, upon the tall trees, the network of undergrowth, and the dead twigs upon the ground; and a faint breeze causing the leaves overhead to undulate in ghostly silence, gave the forest the appearance of a moving, glittering panorama, not of the earth, earthly. It was as though Sanderson had stepped out of a red and glowing hell into a pale, trembling one.

The kangaroos hopped by, opossums capered amidst the overhanging branches, the squirrels darted across his very feet, all eyeing him without a trace of fear. They had learned to know him. For this spot, night after night, had been the lover's trysting place, for months past. Here had they vowed their vows of mutual faith and patience and endurance. Here had they met with smiles, and parted in sorrow, not devoid of hope—that parting which is such sweet pain.

Suddenly Sanderson's eyes lighted. He stepped forward with outstretched hands. He saw her coming down the bridle-path, clad in white, her great, blue eyes aglow, a faint flush about her face, rising no higher than the lashes of her eyes, her lovely hair touched with palest gold. She seemed like some beauteous forest sprite, a fairy of the tree-belted hillside.

He took her hands in his, and drew her to him, kissing her red, tempting lips with a certain desperate tenderness, as though he feared that he might never so kiss her again.

Then they sat, side by side, hand clasping hand, upon the fallen tree trunk, and she whispered to him of her fears, of how her father had sworn to ruin him, beyond the ruin which he had already wrought him; had even sworn to bring about his death.

And he reassured her, allaying the dread, the horrible haunting fear for his safety, that ever nestled, snake-like, in her bosom. He told her of how he progressed at O'Calligan's store, of how the old man spoke of taking him into partnership now that he—O'Calligan—was growing old and feeble.

But when he had ceased speaking the old dread, the haunting fear, came back and gripped her with a strength that there was no resisting. And she told him of the terror and revulsion with which Johnson, the nephew of O'Calligan, inspired her

"Why should you fear him, dearest?" he asked, running his fingers through her locks of wavy hair. "Why should you fear him?"

"It is for your safety that I fear," she answered.

"Pshaw! I am not afraid of him. He is certainly a loose, dissipated scoundrel, who would not stick at anything; but *I* am stronger than he is, so he could not injure me much, bodily; and O'Calligan has helped him monetarily so often to no purpose, that he has now refused to do so again, and this afternoon he ordered him out of the store—I must say I did not much like the look on Johnson's face, as he shuffled out, it was fiendish; but *I* am thought well of by O'Calligan, so Johnson could not injure me much in my business."

And thus he once again allayed her fears.

A little later a red, glowing spot shone from the township through the trees.

"It is a bush fire," said Eva.

Sanderson scanned it curiously for a minute or two, and then turned to his companion.

"It is a fire in the township," he said, "in the direction of O'Calligan's store. See how the sky is lighting up. God! it is the store!"

One clasp of her hand, one hurried embrace, and he was dashing through the forest to the scene of the conflagration.

He had judged rightly. The flames were bursting from the store.

The building was of wood, as dry as tinder, and the contents were of a light, inflammable nature. The tongues of fire burst through the chinks and windows, they lapped the roof with hunger and ravening, they twined about the chimney stack, they leapt upwards towards the sky. It was a lurid spectacle. The valley was lit up from end to end, and the rough faces in the

"It is the store!"

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quickly gathering crowd of miners shone red; they looked like an assembly of fiends.

"Is O'Calligan inside?" that was the question which Harry Sanderson kept mentally asking, as he rushed upon the scene.

He made at top speed for the back entrance, and despite the ferocity of the fire, shook the door again and again, flung himself against it, strove to kick it in, and——

A terrible blow from a pistol butt laid him low. He dropped like a log.

Johnson, for he it was who brought Sanderson down, senseless, dragged him away from the doomed store.

A horrible grin played about his repulsive features.

"Here he is, lads!" he shouted. "Here is the murderer! Here is the dog, who burnt his master to death in his bed! I collared him. He was clearing away through the back door; he had a lighted firebrand in his hand."

A hoarse murmur from the crowd greeted this intelligence. A murmur that grew in force until it broke into a roar of excitement.

They pressed round O'Calligan's prostrate assistant. They bound him hands and feet, and set a guard over him, for the remainder of the night.

Such an occurrence was meat and drink to their vitiated, brutal tastes.

In the meantime, the store was reduced to a heap of smouldering ashes.

* * * * *

The sun broke away from his concealment behind the hills, to light up an animated scene the next morning. All was bustle and excitement, an event was about to happen that always proved highly interesting to the more too refined miners. A man was to be tried for his life. Rough and ready were the trials in those days; if the public judged the prisoner guilty he was strung up to the nearest tree in the course of the next few minutes. It was camp law.

All the town came and gazed on Sanderson, who, recovered from his blow, stood bound to a massive tree trunk, facing the scene of the over-night fire, and each made an audible remark concerning his appearance, passing on to a shanty, or joining one of the many groups of miners, who were eagerly discussing the situation. Everyone intended making a day of it. Bets and wagers were made freely upon the result of the trial.

A stout man with bloodshot eyes and a blotched countenance stood not twenty yards from the prisoner. He was betting upon the event.

"Three to one! Three to one! I'll lay three to one it's a hanging job!" he was shouting, as he thumped his fist upon an upturned tub.

"Take fives," said another; and the bet was booked.

Wilson, who—as leading man in the township—was to act as judge, and also to conduct the prosecution (an honourable and just method of putting a man upon trial), had been early astir, and had had frequent interviews with Johnson, the principal witness.

A gang of miners had searched the *débris* of the store, and had discovered a few charred bones, which were handed over to Wilson.

The trial was held in the main street in order that the proceedings might be as public as possible. A rough stage had been erected, upon one end of which stood a box—the dock; and the centre was reserved for witnesses, the other end being occupied by Wilson. A bell attached to the roof of a shanty rang out an intimation that the proceedings were about to commence.

Wilson, looking grave, upright, one who keenly felt the responsibility of his position, gave the order "Bring forward the prisoner," and Harry Sanderson looking

Came and gazed on Sanderson.

pale and troubled, yet with an expression of determination upon his face, was led to the stage and placed in the rudely carpentered box.

His arrival was greeted by cheers, groans, and blasphemous oaths, and the wagering started in right earnest.

After a time, Wilson succeeded in restoring something approaching order, and he read out the charge of incendiarism and murder. "How do you plead, guilty, or not guilty?"

The prisoner raised his fearless grey eyes, and looked at Wilson. The crowd became still as death, breathlessly listening.

"Not guilty," came the confident reply, followed by a burst of cheers and counter cheers.

"Where were you last night when the fire broke out?" asked Wilson, when order was restored.

"I refuse to answer," the prisoner said.

"I'll bet ten to one he swings," roared a big digger.

"Done, I'll take it, for all you're worth," said another. The prisoner looked towards the man and smiled his thanks. He knew that the judgment of the public depended a good deal upon the drift of the betting.

Wilson waited for the amount of the wager to be settled, then he called the first witness, Johnson.

The appearance of this man upon the platform was greeted by his friends with loud cheering and considerable banter.

Never was more open enthusiasm at a Spanish bullfight. They had their human bull in the arena, the matador was there, they merely wished to see him goaded and gored to madness before they held their thumbs down for the signal of death.

Johnson began his story:

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"Jim O'Calligan was my uncle," said he. "We had, as the whole township knows, an occasional row; but we were fond of each other."

"Did you quarrel with him yesterday?" asked Wilson.

"No, we were very friendly. I went into the store and found the prisoner and my uncle having a row, and I told the prisoner not to try and bully an old man. I stopped the row."

"You lie, Johnson," said the prisoner.

The crowd crushed eagerly forward.

"What happened then?"

"I asked the prisoner what he was carrying on about. He said that O'Calligan had refused to give him his wages."

"Another lie," said Sanderson.

"Did you hear him make any threats?" Wilson made the leading question.

"He said that he had a good mind to roast the old Jew alive."

"You lying scoundrel," shouted Sanderson as he strove to free himself.

The crowd shouted in excitement.

Johnson cast a sneering glance at the prisoner, during the interruption; and taking a piece of hard tobacco from his pocket, bit off a piece, and commenced to chew it nonchalantly.

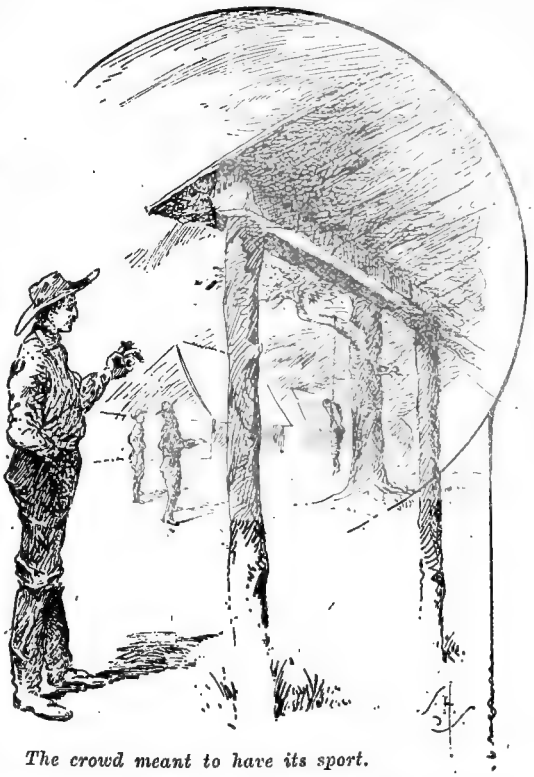
When silence was restored, Wilson continued his examination of the witness.

"Did you see him come out of the burning store?"

"Yes. He rushed out with his clothes singed as you see them; he had a lighted brand in his hand."

"Another villainous lie," said the prisoner. His face was white as death, when the crowd turned towards him, and shook clenched fists, and hooted in his face.

He knew that his life was worth but little more than a minute's purchase.



The crowd meant to have its sport.

"What have you to say to that, prisoner?" Wilson asked when order was restored. "The witness says that he caught you red-handed."

"I say it is a lie. I was trying to break open the door, to enter; for I feared O'Calligan was in the building. That is how my clothes became singed. Suddenly I felt a heavy blow on the head. I knew nothing after that, until I came to, to find myself bound with these." He held his corded wrists up as he spoke. Great beads of sweet stood upon his brow. He turned to the assembled throng, looking for one glance of belief in the eyes of only one; but Johnson's words had taken effect.

Not one friendly look was cast upon him.

"To the tree! To the tree! Give him the murderer's dancing ground!" they shouted.

"Stop!" It was a woman's voice, shrill, terror-stricken, but commanding, that rang out through the clamour.

In another instant, Eva Wilson, pushing her way through the miners, clambered on to the platform.

"Stop!" she cried again, throwing back her pale, beautiful face, and raising her slender hand, in the grandeur of terror, of fear for the life of the man whom she loved.

Surprised into silence the crowd watched her.

"Stand down," said her father sternly.

She threw him a look of defiance. "Not until the prisoner, Harry Sanderson, stands down also," she said in clear tones.

The miners, coarse, low, brutal, as many of them were, nevertheless had their ideas of fair play. They cheered themselves hoarse, as the girlish form stood there, in the full light of the sun, upon that raised platform, ready to defend, it might be to lay down her life for the life of her sweetheart. She looked like a beautiful tigress deprived of her whelps, a woman whose child was at the mercy of one more powerful than herself, but yet one whom she defied. In a frenzy of excitement the miners demanded that she should be heard; and Wilson had no course open to him, save that of submitting.

Then, amidst utter silence, she spoke again.

"Harry Sanderson was in my presence in the forest, close to our house, father, when the fire broke out; and we had been together for more than two hours. When he saw the fire, Harry Sanderson ran to the store to try and save his master and his master's goods. More, he told me only a few minutes before that that man"—she pointed one taper finger at Johnson—"had been turned out of the store that afternoon by his uncle!"

A volley of cheers greeted her. She stepped towards the prisoner and laid one hand upon his shoulder. They should defy this bearer of false witness together.

"What do you say to that, Johnson?" Wilson asked.

"I say it is a lie," said the witness, shifting uneasily.

"And I endorse that, Johnson," Wilson said, "for the girl is my daughter, and she was in my house all the evening."

"You lie, sir," the prisoner said firmly, "I was with your daughter. We have been in the habit of meeting ever since you robbed me of my share in the mine."

"Two and two," shouted the crowd excitedly. "More evidence," came a voice from a neighbouring window.

Wilson tugged at his beard. "They are lovers," he said, "and will naturally swear to the same lie. But we have more evidence. We have these charred bones to prove the death of O'Calligan. We know that the prisoner has lied, for he says that I have robbed him of

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a share in my mine. The property always was mine. I have the copy of the register here. Who likes may read it."

"The bones, are they a proof?" The voice of Eva broke upon their ears again.

"Decidedly. It shows that the prisoner is not only an incendiary, but also a murderer," her father replied.

"How do you know that they are Jim O'Calligan's bones? How do you know that they are human bones at all?"

"What other bones could they be?" Wilson asked, shrugging his shoulders, as though to prolong the argument was waste of time.

"Ham bones or bacon bones, they might easily have been," she replied. "Hams were sold at the store."

"These bones were all lying together. I found them myself, lying as though O'Calligan had fallen, stifled, in a heap."

A groan ran through the crowd. Once again they cast menacing glances at the prisoner.

"If that is so—" Eva began.

"Encugh, the evidence is damning. I pronounce—"

"Stop!" she shrieked, holding up her hand.

"If these bones are the bones of O'Calligan, how is it his skull is not there? It would be curious if the skull was completely burned, and the bones, bits of them, remained."

Once more the crowd wavered, and greeted her with cheers.

"Let someone search until he finds the skull. If that"— she pointed to the heap of burnt bones—"is what remains of O'Calligan, the skull will be in the spot on which you found those bones. If the skull is not there, then set the prisoner free."

Then she turned about and faced the crowd. "Gentlemen," she said, in spite of the president's evident desire to prove the prisoner guilty, "I ask you, as lovers of fair play, to order the court to be adjourned until the missing skull is found."

"An adjournment! An adjournment!" the crowd yelled with one voice, and Wilson had no alternative save that of obeying the will of the men gathered round about him.

Several miners instantly went in quest of the missing skull, but no trace of it did they find in the ash-covered *débris*.

Suddenly the prisoner lifted up his bowed head. The shout: "Stand aside! Gangway! Gangway!" fell upon his ear. Had they found the skull? So much depended on that skull. He shook like a leaf in his terrible excitement.

It was a horseman who picked his way through the onlookers. It was old Jim O'Calligan in the flesh.

"Lads," he shouted heartily. "I've been over to Warmgardie; I made up my mind to go directly Harry Sanderson left the store. I've got a deed of partnership for him to sign, in my pocket. Harry Sanderson left the store *before* me. Understand? He is as innocent as I am. He is one of the finest fellows I have ever met. But if you want to know who *threatened* to fire the store and fizzle my bones—it was *that* man!"

He pointed one accusing finger at Johnson, and looked him squarely in the face.

The crowd meant to have its anticipated sport, and without consulting Wilson, or waiting for further developments, they sprang upon the wretched man, Johnson, and dragged him to the tree. In less than five minutes his body swung in the air, riddled with bullets.

Wilson spread out his arms. His features contorted. He fell forward upon his face, in a fit of epilepsy.

When he came to his senses again, he stretched out his hand to Sanderson, who had been liberated, and begged his forgiveness.

Harry Sanderson gripped the hand and wrung it heartily.

"If it hadn't been for the delay you procured," he later whispered to Eva, "I should——"

She laughed and cried as she looked at him.

"You—you are safe now, darling," she whispered.

"Yes, saved by a modern Portia," he retorted, kissing away her tears.

W. Keppel Honnywill.

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Editorial Mind.

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HOW THE MAN IN LIVERY WON AN HEIRESS.

Translated from the French of Mme. Care.

I was Eliane du Rocher's guardian. At the age of eight she had lost both her parents. Her health was delicate, and I thought the best thing to do for her was to put her to a convent school in the country.

I myself had three sons. Eliane, when of age, would come into possession of £50, and, as I did not want to be accused of paternal covetousness, I desisted from taking her to my home. Consequently she spent all her vacations at school, grew up beautiful, and thereby caused me to redouble my precautions.

She showed religious proclivities, and professed a vocation for convent life. I remonstrated against her becoming a nun, but she urged that she was happy, and wanted nothing better than to pass her existence at the convent. When of age, she for two years devoted her whole income to feeding and clothing the poor of Juilly.

One morning, however, I received the following astonishing letter:

My dear Guardian,—I am bored. After mature reflection, I find that I am not cut out for a religious career. Kindly find me a husband as soon as possible. Your grateful and devoted Eliane.

I hurried to the convent. "So you are bored?"

"To death, my dear guardian."

"And you wish to marry simply for lack of something better to do?"

"Exactly."

"Have you considered?"

"Not very much—only enough to know that since I am bored at the convent, I can have no religious vocation. I won't be an old maid. There is nothing left then, except marriage—or death."

"How you jump at conclusions!"

"Have you, in your infinite wisdom, anything else to suggest?"

"Hum! And what do you require for the happy mortal, your future husband?"

"Nothing—except that he pleases me."

"Very well. But what does please you? You must have some ideal—all girls have."

"Not I," she answered quietly. "Remember, my kind friend, that I know only three men; you, our father confessor, and the convent gardener, and——"

"And?"

She slightly tossed her head.

"Well, they are not at all what I want."

I was fully aware that I, stout, bald, and near-sighted, could not be the fancy of a handsome girl of twenty, still, I felt a little provoked at being told it so plainly.

"Very well," I said, rather gruffly.

She kissed me. Probably she would have been more circumspect had I been her ideal; anyhow, her kiss calmed me.

"I shall seek and find."

She dropped me a nice little courtesy, and we parted.

It does not seem hard to find a candidate for the hand of a young and charming heiress. I presented quite a number of men to her—nice fellows, too; but none suited her. Summer was passing, and each week Eliane sent me a card with the words: "I am bored."

"Don't be so hard to please, then; make a choice," I answered, in exasperation.

Things were at this point, when my old friend, the curate of Redon, spoke to me of the Marquise de Pen-Valloët and her two sons. Old family, distinguished name, good connections, respectable fortune. I proposed to Eliane to spend a few weeks with my wife at Trouville, and she joyfully accepted.

"On the way," said I, "we will stop at one of my clients, the Marquise de Pen-Valloët."

"I wager your client has a son."

"Two, in fact."

"So much the easier to choose."

The Marquise resided on a large estate some miles from Redon. I had been told of her strictly economical way of living, so I was not surprised to find awaiting us at the station an old rattletrap of a carriage, which smelt so musty that, as we started to get in, Eliane recoiled.

"Suppose we ride outside; I should enjoy the fresh air."

"I don't see any ladder," said I, dismayed at the steep climb.

"Bah! one foot on the wheel, another near the coachman, and there you are."

"You want to break my neck."

"Don't be afraid, sir," said the coachman, offering me his strong hand, and helping me to mount quite easily.

"Evidently an ex-soldier," thought I, looking admiringly at the robust, handsome figure of the man.

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Eliane seemed no more than a feather in his strong grasp. Before I was seated she was beside me, radiant and happy as a lark.

"You will be afraid," said I, measuring the distance from our perch to the ground.

"Afraid! You don't know me. You will cry quarter before I do. Now, driver, quick, quick!"

The man smiled rather sarcastically, I thought.

"Not too fast, my boy," I said. "Don't listen to that featherbrain."

He gathered up his reins and started his team. Heavens, what a race! My blood curdles at the thought of it. Eliane clapped her hands and incited the pleased coachman to redoubled efforts. I held on with might and main, prepared to jump at the expected crash.

My torture lasted thirty-five minutes, during which I must have grown ten years older. The carriage turned sharply to the right, we raced up a narrow road, and stopped short in a paved court. The precision with which the ponies halted at the door would have done honour to circus-horses, but I was too vexed to admire.

"You came near killing us," I said to the coachman.

"Everyone knows his own business, sir; I know mine," he answered phlegmatically.

A handsome, refined-looking young man of medium height met us and assisted us to alight.

Mme. de Pen-Valloët received us in the large, gloomy drawing-room, hung with ancestral pictures more or less hideous. She herself, in her old-fashioned, faded gown, looked like an old family portrait descended from its frame. She greeted us graciously, and herself led us to our apartments.

"My son, René," she said, designating the handsome young man who had first received us, "has awaited your coming with great impatience, the curate's description of you and Mlle. Eliane was so flattering. And then we lead such a retired life, have few calls, fewer neighbours, only some friends of my own age. Your visit is a perfect godsend, and I hope you will make it a long one."

I thought the old lady's severe grey eyes rested with pleasure on my little ward.

Dinner was ready. We had just time to change our travelling attire. When Eliane reappeared, in her simple white gown, she looked queenly beautiful. René met her at the door with some compliment which did not seem to displease her.

Covers were laid for five. We were only four, however, and the plate opposite our hostess remained vacant. Nobody seemed to notice it, and dinner was served.

The *cuisine* was good, the wines choice. The service might have been better. The little servant who waited on us seemed a novice at his task. He broke a plate, and his mistress gave him a severe look.

Just then another guest entered—a man of about thirty, tall and with a strong face. Saluting us, he took the empty place opposite Mme. de Pen-Valloët.

"My first son, Marquis Horace de Pen-Valloët," she said, presenting him, adding: "Late as usual."

"You know why, mother," he answered coldly.

I could not take my eyes off the new-comer. Where had I met him? His voice awoke some disagreeable memory, yet I could not place him.

The conversation became livelier. I understood that the Marquis had lived in India, and asked whether it was so.

"I have travelled a great deal," he answered laconically.

"Too much," added his mother.

"Are not the Eastern climates rather trying to Europeans?" I asked, not knowing exactly what to say.

He shook his head. "I never was better than when travelling. Only I spent my fortune—a thing my mother cannot forget."

"Your fortune and a part of mine," added the Marquise, rather bitterly.

We turned the conversation, and when dinner was over, I feared the long evening yet to come.

Mme. de Pen-Valloët proposed a game of bezique to me, while René sat down to the piano, and, with a pretty tenor voice, sang German and Breton songs.

At last came the time for retiring. I signalled to Eliane, who was in languid conversation with the elder Pen Valloët, while the younger was still warbling away.

"Well," said I, when we were alone.

She stifled a yawn. "Let us go to bed. I am tired to death."

"Not before you have told me your impression of the two candidates."

"The younger is handsome, he has a pretty voice, and dresses well. That is all I know so far"

"And the other?"

She laughed. "The other? Why, he hasn't a cent. He doesn't count as a match, guardie, dear."

"True. I always thought you were a sensible girl."

Next morning it was late when I awoke.

I had hardly finished my toilet before Eliane, fresh and bright as the morning, knocked for admittance.

"What! up already?"

"Already! Why, I have had a long walk through the dewy woods. It was exquisite."

"Alone?"

"Oh, no. I made sure of an escort last night."

"Ah! ha! So things are working?"

"Spendidly, my dear guardian. Open your ears. I have decided to marry——"

"Handsome René?" said I, rubbing my hands.

"No; I am going to marry—the coachman who drove so well yesterday As soon as I placed my hand in his, I knew he was a man a woman could trust. But here he is to tell you that you are not dreaming."

She opened the door, and Horace de Pen-Velloët entered.

"Myself!" he said, smiling at my astonishment. "My story is not long, but rather unusual. I wanted to be a soldier. My mother objected. I obeyed her, but the spirit of adventure possessed me. As soon as I was of age I started on a trip round the world. My mother told you I spent my fortune and part of hers. I dare say I committed my share of follies. When my means were exhausted I returned home. The fatted calf was not killed in my honour. On the contrary, I had to put up with reproaches, complaints and taunts. What was I to do? Incapable of earning my living, exasperated at hearing myself reproached for eating the bread of idleness, I offered to take the place of my mother's coachman, who had died. I loved horses—and you know I can drive."

"I still feel it," said I, shaking myself.

"When I offered my services to my mother I was half joking, but she accepted in earnest, so I became the coachman. I take care of my animals, and, when it is necessary, put on the livery. At night I resume my dress-suit, my title, and my rights, as eldest son. And this might have gone on for ever, but for the coming of this liberating fairy, my charming *fiancée*, who, I think, understands me, and will try to love me a little."

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THE GREAT MIDDLEWICK BANK ROBBERY

SUMMARY.

Mr. Bryant, *Manager of Middlewick Bank.*
Herbert Stewart, *Cashier.*
Frank Rutherford, *Book-keeper.*
Alfred Taylor, *Detective.*
John Warren, *Old Watchman.*
Jack Burton, *New Watchman—a detective in disguise.*
Miss Denton, *Bryant's niece, and in love with Rutherford.*

£20,000 is stolen from the Bank one night while John Warren is asleep. The only persons apparently aware of the key to the combination lock are Mr. Bryant and Mr. Stewart. Taylor is led to suspect Frank Rutherford of having obtained the key to the lock, and shadows him. It appears that an attempt is to be made on the strong room by three notorious burglars—Nash, King, and Birch—who know nothing about the previous robbery. Arrangements are made to capture them, and two constables—Bates and Morton—are to be placed in the building, while Taylor and Burton watch outside.

CHAPTER IX.

A Stiff Chase.

It would not do for Sam Birch to retain his present position. As explained, he was too far from the bank to give prompt notice of the approach of danger. Accordingly, waiting only a moment after the door had closed behind his confederates, he sauntered to the corner and took position within a few steps of the building. There, instead of assuming a fixed posture, he walked slowly past for a dozen paces, and then returned, beginning a regular tramp, which would give him the scope of vision he needed.

Burton was alert. Instead of following him immediately, he remained in the shadow of the doorway for fully five minutes. He wished to wait until matters were moving within the bank itself. Then he stepped out from his concealment and imitated the action of the other watcher.

At that late hour not another person was in sight. Before, however, Burton reached the corner, a pedestrian came at a pace from the opposite direction, his course taking him in front of the steps and past the sentinel. The latter coughed in the most natural manner in the world, while the stranger, with no thought of what was going on so near him, hurried by and vanished from sight.

Burton had not checked his own moderate pace, and was now within a short distance of where Birch was slowly walking to and fro. The criminal had his eye on him, and seeing that he would pass near him, he again coughed. There could be no mistake as to the meaning of the simple signal.

An advantage presented itself to Burton, who was moving in the same direction as the other and only a few steps behind him. It was evident to the new watchman that Sam Birch had no more suspicion regarding him than he had of the stranger who had just passed out of sight. Yielding to impulse, Burton paused in front of the steps, as though he had caught some suspicious sound.

Birch instantly stopped in his beat, looked round and came back to where Burton stood.

"What's the matter with you?" he gruffly asked.

"I wonder if there's anything wrong in there," was the innocent reply of Burton.

"Look here, young man, you had better move on. I've been hired to watch that bank, and I'll run you in if you hang about here. If you want to save your skin, hurry home and go to bed."

Birch advanced angrily, with hand outstretched to seize the throat of the innocent-looking person. Burton retreated a single step. Then his right fist shot out like lightning, landing with crashing force upon the jaw of the astounded criminal, who staggered backwards and would have fallen to the ground had he not collided with the lamp-post behind him.

His right fist shot out.

Burton's blood was up, and he had dashed forward intending to fell his man to the earth and then slip the handcuffs upon him, but he was checkmated by the unexpected course of the ruffian.

Without uttering the signal to his friends within the bank to apprise them of what was going on, and without the faintest attempt to resent the assault, he turned and sped up the street like a deer.

For the moment Burton was disconcerted, for he had not dreamed of any such display of cowardice. The next instant, however, he was after the fugitive with the fleetness of a greyhound.

Burton was as good at running as was his friend Taylor, and it need not be said that he did not let grass grow under his feet. Birch kept in

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the middle of the street, where the way was open and there was no danger of running into any obstructions. This suited the pursuer, who ran as if his own life was at stake. He steadily gained, and, if no unexpected obstacle interposed, was sure to overtake his man in a very little while.

Sam Birch had proved himself a coward, but even a coward will fight viciously when driven into a corner. At the first corner the fugitive darted to the right with undiminished speed. Had he caught sight of any shelter he would have whisked into it; but hardly a second was at his command in which to search for one, and he kept on. Thus, when Burton shot round the same corner, he saw his man running in front of him, with the interval between them sensibly diminished and fast diminishing.

It was at this juncture that the pursuer became aware that he was not the only one chasing the burglar. Some person was running after him, and was close behind. Burton concluded a stranger had joined in the pursuit on general principles and with no knowledge of what it all meant.

But the watchman had no time to give the matter any thought. His hands were full with the fellow in front. Middlewick, it will be remembered, was a small town, and the race had not lasted long when all parties were dashing through the outskirts. At the next corner Burton had approached so close to his man that the latter would not have dared to drop out of sight had an opening appeared before him. He had not a spare second at his disposal.

"Stop, or I'll fire! I know you, Sam Birch!"

The answer was startling. The panting fugitive turned like a flash and let fly with two chambers of his revolver straight at his pursuer, who was almost upon him. Burton instinctively ducked his head and the shots sped harmlessly past, though it is not to be supposed that this action caused his escape. The fugitive was too flurried and in too great a haste to secure a good aim. The angered watchman fired one charge at the fellow, who had turned at bay, but with no more effect than the other shots. The next instant the two came together like a couple of tigers. The fierce struggle lasted but a few seconds, when a blow felled Birch to the ground, and Burton sprang upon him. There the contest continued with the same ferocity. Both were powerful men, and each realised what was at stake.

Leapt . . . with his revolver.

With the exception of the command shouted a few minutes before by the watchman, not a word was spoken by the antagonists. Words, like laughter, draw upon one's strength, and neither had an ounce to spare. It was useless to try to slip the cuffs on the wrist of Birch. He was fighting too furiously. Burton therefore concentrated his strength in the single effort to conquer him.

He probably would have succeeded, for, after all, he was the equal of the other in muscular power and his superior in science, but fate played more than one queer freak with the actors in the drama of that evening.

It has been stated that a third party had joined in the chase. The delay caused by the collision between the principals gave this person time to arrive on the scene.

It was the police Superintendent, whose withdrawal from the immediate neighbourhood of the bank did not signify

"Confound you! Why did you strike me?"

the withdrawal of his interest in the expected events. Following the watchman's request, he waited in one of the side streets, from which he could quickly reach the bank, should it become necessary.

Catching sight of a man running with another in hot pursuit, the Superintendent felt that duty required him to take part. Not the equal of either in point of speed, he still made such good progress that he soon reached them after they came together for the second time. The Superintendent had armed himself for this business. Besides the revolver in his pocket he carried a policeman's truncheon. This he drew while he ran, concluding to leave the deadlier weapon for a more serious emergency.

Although Supt. Dixon was usually a cool man, this was the first time he had ever been engaged in an affair of this nature, and he became a trifle excited. He ought to have kept away altogether or have delegated his functions to one of his officers.

He saw two men struggling on the ground, the one underneath striving desperately to exchange positions with the other and almost succeeding, despite the determined resistance of the upper man. One of the parties was the new watchman and the other a stranger. There was no saying, so far as Dixon saw, which was getting the better of the struggle, so he interfered at the critical moment.

Time was so precious that he could not pause to take aim but when the truncheon came down the blow did its work. One of the contestants toppled over, stunned for the instant, while the other, struggling to his feet, was off again at the top of his speed.

"Confound you! Why did you strike *me?*" demanded the irate Burton, quickly recovering himself.

"I — really — beg a thousand pardons — but it looks as if I had made a mistake, Mr. Burton! I hope you'll excuse me."

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"Go home and to bed," was the angry response of the watchman, who, seeing that not a second was to be lost, dashed off a second time in pursuit of the fugitive.

The latter was using his slight advantage to the utmost. Had the delay of the watchman lasted half a minute longer, the criminal must have effected his escape.

The firing of pistols naturally attracted attention in that part of the town, even though the hour was late. Making no reply to the numerous questions of the excited onlookers, the chagrined Superintendent hastened after the flying couple.

The new watchman's head was ringing from the effects of the blow, but he concentrated all his energy upon the task before him and ran at the highest speed, determined to have his man at all costs.

Birch vaulted over a low railing in front of a house, sped across the garden and darted round a building to the rear. Burton did the same, a few yards behind him. The instant the fugitive was out of sight he looked round for something in the nature of a refuge. It was useless to run in this fashion when he was certain of being overtaken. If he could dart into some cover possibly he might throw his pursuer off the track, but there must not be a moment's delay in finding the refuge.

Glancing to the right and left in his frantic search, he saw in the shadows the open door of a small building, and made for it. At the moment he was about to plunge through the opening, a huge dog bounded out, almost into his face. Birch wheeled and leapt the fence at the rear and continued his flight.

The mastiff started to follow, but just then Jack Burton, at full speed, came upon the scene. The dog concluded that *he* would serve his purpose, as well as the other, and went for him. He was a formidable brute, and the watchman did not mean to give him the chance of grasping either his leg or throat. Besides, he was tired of being interfered with while performing his duty: it was becoming monotonous.

The canine was in earnest, and with a threatening growl came bounding towards the watchman.

"I'll settle your hash for you," muttered Burton, aiming with such care that the single bullet bored its way through the skull of the dog and stretched him lifeless.

The interruption had caused a slight delay but not enough to defeat the purpose of the pursuit. Burton had kept the fugitive well in sight and sped after him with redoubled energy. Sam Birch made the fatal mistake of not keeping in the rear of the dwellings on the outskirts, among which he might have found some chance of temporary shelter. Instead of doing that, however, he began making his way back to the street from which he had fled.

He quickly clambered out of sight.

The long chase was beginning to tell upon both pursuer and pursued; much more, however, upon the latter, for a life of dissipation saps the strength of anyone. Birch must quickly discover some refuge or turn about and have it out with Burton, who was now fresher and stronger than he.

At the rear of a handsome house was a small wooden structure, one of several others that were used for domestic fowls, pigeons, and pet animals. It was two storeys high, but the swinging open door was so near the ground that a moderate leap on the part of the fugitive carried the upper half of his body through, and he quickly clambered out of sight.

Burton had no objection to this, for he knew the man had no knowledge of what the issue would be. The watchman quickly walked round the building, to learn what means of egress it possessed, in order to prevent his man stealing a march upon him.

There was a door on the opposite side, facing the back of the residence, but that was even with the ground. The ends of the little building were without any opening. By keeping the back and front under his eye, he could hold Birch securely caged. It will be admitted, however, that it is no easy matter for anyone to watch the front and back of a building at the same time, with an alert foe inside on the look-out for a chance to elude him.

As the best that could be done, Burton drew off as far as his surroundings would permit, and took up his position opposite one of the ends of the structure. By doing this he could detect the fugitive before he could run far. Birch, having found the refuge, made the best possible use of it, though he must have seen it could not serve him long. He did not show himself, but gave his attention for some time to regaining his breath and strength. He also kept an eye on the upper and lower door. He had landed on his feet in the structure without mishap.

After a few minutes' rest, he began groping about to make sure of his location. This was not satisfactory. The sides of the building showed so few streaks of moonlight through the crevices that he struck a match and held it over his head. The house was about a dozen feet square and high and was evidently used for the storage of hay, though there were only a few handfuls of dried grass on the floor. He blew out the match and waited.

The watchman had been in that neighbourhood twice before, and that, too, within the last couple of hours. His keen perception enabled him to recognise the spot, even though his point of view was not favourable. It was curious that the fleeing burglar should have taken refuge on the property of the bank manager, but such was the fact.

Burton's greatest fear, while waiting for Birch, was that of another dog precipitating himself upon the scene. That the thing did not occur within the first few minutes made him come to the conclusion that Mr. Bryant was not the owner of a canine. The watchman felt that he had his man caged but he dreaded the enforced waiting it compelled. It was easy to follow Sam Birch and have it out with him, but no bravery could excuse such an action. It was like hunting a burglar with a lighted candle; the advantage is all with the criminal who has the best possible chance to pick off the other without risk to himself.

But Burton was anxious to learn what was going on at the bank. Matters there must have reached and passed a crisis by this time. It was a pity that he should be compelled to stand idle waiting for his victim to venture out and try it again or to surrender. If the latter was to be the issue it was not likely to take place for a number of hours.

The trees and outbuildings were in alternate moonlight and shadow. The watchman was on the alert and listening, when the outlines of a man appeared approaching the rear of the grounds from the front. He was either someone belonging to "Glenmora" or he had come through the front gate.

When the moonlight fell upon the individual, Burton, with strange emotion, recognised him as his old acquaintance the Superintendent.

"He has his truncheon in hand, too," muttered the watchman. "I wonder whether he's dissatisfied with that blow and wants to try it over again?"

Dixon was anxious to do all he could to repair his blunder. He had striven hard to keep up with the procession and managed to gain enough knowledge of the

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whereabouts of the two men to believe they were not far from the rear of Mr. Bryant's residence, so he looked for them there and thus met Jack Burton.

It took but a minute to explain the situation.

"He's in there," added the watchman, pointing to the small whitewashed building, "and we shall have to wait until he is ready to surrender."

"I see no need of that."

"What can we do?"

"I will bring some of my men and fetch him out."

"'A stag at bay is a dangerous foe,' but that is the best thing to do after all."

"Can you keep him here till we come back?"

"I'll guarantee to do that. I only wish he would come out here, where I can have a chance at him."

The fact that Supt. Dixon was the head of the police of the enterprising town of Middlewick suddenly broke upon that official with all its weight. It was not to be supposed that the fugitive crouching in the barn was aware of the overwhelming fact.

"Wait till I speak to him," he said, walking towards the hay-shed.

"Don't go too close, or he'll fire at you," warned the watchman.

"He will not after I tell him who I am."

The Superintendent had no intention of entering the building, but pausing just below the open door, he called: "Hulloa, you in there?"

"I hear you," came from within.

"I am the Superintendent of the Middlewick Police, and I demand your surrender."

"Why don't you come and take me?"

"If you refuse to give yourself up, I will bring those here who will compel you."

Recognised him as his old acquaintance, the Superintendent.

"What will you do with me if I give in?"

"That remains to be seen; all I can promise is that you shall have justice done you."

"That's what I'm afraid of," was the grim response; "but what is your charge against me? I haven't done anything."

The Superintendent was about to attempt an impressive reply when Burton whispered:

"Tell him you do not know of any charge. The fellow really hasn't done anything this time other than give me a pretty good tussle."

"All you will have to do is to prove your innocence of complicity in the robbery of the bank."

This must have startled the burglar, for, added to what had already taken place, it proved that the intentions of his gang had become known to the authorities. Doubtless he held more than one uncomfortable thought concerning the man who had thus run him down, but unmistakably he was in a tight fix.

"I think it's you that will have to do the proving business, but I'll give myself up," was the unexpected response.

The Superintendent must have felt flattered by this deference to his exalted position.

That Sam Birch was in earnest was proved the next minute by his action.

"Meet me at the front door of my residence," he said, and the couple came round to the front, as requested. Then he came out.

"As a guarantee of good faith," said the watchman, "you will hand over that pistol to Mr. Dixon."

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The fellow complied. As he did so, the three were standing in the full moonlight. Birch turned and looked so keenly at Jack Burton that the latter smiled and asked: "Do you know me, Sam?"

Birch muttered something, and replied louder:

"Yes, and I'll get even with you for this."

"All right; it's a fair warning, but just at present you'll do as you're told."

At the request of the Superintendent, Burton walked on one side of the prisoner so as to help guard against any attempt at escape on his part. Shortly after Sam Birch was safely under lock and key.

CHAPTER X.

He was Hard Hit.

Meanwhile a lively scene was going on within the Middlewick Bank. The two policemen heard the parties at the lock of the outer door, while the town clock was striking midnight, and they quietly rose to their feet. It will be remembered that they were at the rear of the building, in the manager's room where they had decided to remain for the present.

Though they had discussed the expected visit over and over again and tried to fix upon their own line of action, it was impossible to do so except in a general way, for a great deal, if not everything, depended upon the course taken by the visitors. If the latter should investigate the interior before beginning their work and so enter the manager's apartment, it would precipitate matters.

"Do you know me, Sam?"

The door connecting it with the outer room was slightly ajar, and the officers stood side by side waiting and listening.

That the burglars were experts could not be doubted. It took them but a few seconds to open the door with one of their skeleton keys, then they found themselves inside with the door shut behind them but not locked.

Naturally, they gave their first attention to the watchman. Old Mr. Warren was stretched out on the floor in the condition of the seven sleepers.

"Well, I'll be hanged," exclaimed Nash, "he's a model watchman. I wish we could always have one like him to deal with."

"Better gag him," suggested the other.

"I don't see the need of that."

He emphasised the last remark by giving the watchman a push with his foot.

The latter showed not the very slightest sensibility to the disturbance.

"Let him alone then," added King; "no need of wasting any time on him."

The couple stood for a minute or two listening intently. Nothing to cause misgiving was heard. The gas was turned up, and by its light the eyes moving hither and thither detected nothing suspicious.

"Let's take a look in there," said King, moving towards the manager's room.

"Hold on," interposed his confederate, "remember we've got plenty to do. It isn't likely any of the bank men are lodging here."

King accepted the suggestion, and the two lightly climbed over the counter and began their preparations.

From the bundle Nash carried he produced several pieces of cloth; these were to deaden the force of the explosion necessary to open the safe. In addition, the bundle contained a quantity of fuse, putty, and a valuable outfit of burglars' implements of the finest make.

These were for active operations. They did not know the combination, nor had they any means of obtaining it. It would not take them long with their admirable tools and their own expertness to bore through the door of the vault, insert the powder, packing the space around the fuse with putty so as to render the explosion complete. The cloth carefully spread over the safe would so muffle the sound that it was not likely to attract the attention of passers-by.

Before operations could be commenced, the cough of the sentinel outside was heard. The couple were doing nothing to make a noise, but they paused and listened. King vaulted lightly over the counter again and turned the key in the lock. Should they find it necessary to leave hurriedly the key could be readily turned, while they were naturally averse to having anyone intrude upon them.

Birch coughed again and, for the first time, the burglars were alarmed. Could it be that their scheme was discovered? They hurriedly re-tied the bundle, ready to fly the moment they were warned to do so.

The understanding with Birch was that the cough meant someone was passing in front of the building. It did not of necessity signify peril to his confederates. If he whistled sharply, it meant "Run at once."

But the whistle was not given. It will be recalled that Mr. Birch was so engaged just then in a controversy with Jack Burton that he forgot about his friends in the building.

"It's all right," whispered Will King. "I thought everybody in this town was asleep by this time."

Justice must be done old Warren while he lies slumbering on the floor. In his remorse over the occurrences of a couple of nights before, he had condemned himself too severely. Besides, there was a reason for his sleeping through those hours, which had not yet come to light.

After his discharge he had slumbered at night like the majority of mankind. Having been awake all day and then summoned to his old duties again just when he was ready to go to bed, he was in sore need of sleep. He had now been unconscious a couple of hours or more, and was liable to awaken at any moment and make trouble.

Appreciating the value of the moments, and believing everything favourable, Nash and King again took out their paraphernalia and made ready for the serious business before them. The first thing was to drill a hole through the front of the vault, just above the combination lock. Nash was on the point of beginning the operation when the door of the manager's room creaked. Bates had accidentally moved it an inch or so.

"Joe," whispered King, straightening himself and looking to the rear. "Did you hear that?"

"It was only the creaking of a door."

"But it wouldn't creak unless someone moved it. I'm going to look in there."

"All right, go ahead."

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Will King again bounded over the counter and walked towards the director's room. He had noticed through the crack of it that the gas beyond was burning. That, however, did not of necessity signify anything, nor was he apprehensive, but he wished the full assurance that could only come with the absolute knowledge that no person was in the inner apartment.

The door opened inwardly and without any hesitation King pushed it back and stepped across the threshold. In the act of doing so he received a blow from a policeman's truncheon which sent him rolling backwards. Before he could recover, Bates, who had delivered the stroke, was upon him.

Morton bounded past his friend, and, leaving him to attend to his man, gave his attention to Joe Nash.

"You'd better come quietly," suggested the officer to the man within the inclosure who was on the point of beginning operations upon the safe. No one could have been more courageous than Constable Morton who went over the counter at a single bound. The daring act was unexpected by Nash and so caught him at a disadvantage.

A sharp struggle ensued, in which the constable appeared to have the advantage until a smart blow between the eyes stunned him completely.

Bates meanwhile had fared better, for, before the half-stunned King could recover himself, a heavier stroke descended, followed by another, which laid him low. Then the constable slipped on the handcuffs.

The sound of his comrade's fall told of the desperate nature of the contest between the other couple, but Bates dare not abandon his man until he had him secure. Just before this was affected, King partially recovered and commenced to resist. Ultimately he was brought into subjection, but it took longer than was anticipated.

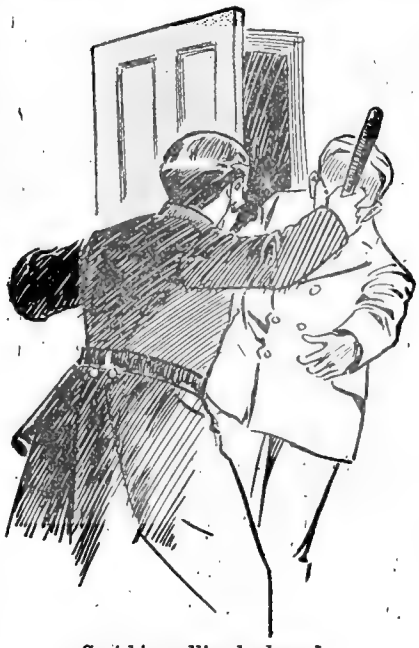
During those precious seconds it was a struggle for life on the part of Constable Morton, for consciousness was rapidly leaving him. Quick to see his advantage, Nash put forth every atom of strength he possessed. By a fierce wrench he flung the officer off his chest, and so completely gained the mastery.

The case was one of those in which the burglars threw all restraint to the winds. They were caught and could escape only by putting their assailants out of the way. They had no intention of showing mercy, knowing as they did that none awaited them. Morton bravely did his best but was unequal to the occasion.

Before the burglar—who had become the assailant—could follow up his advantage, an awkward form scrambled over the counter, caught him by the nape of his coat, and held him sideways against the door of the safe.

"Hang you, ain't you ashamed of yourself! Stay there, or I'll pay you."

It was John Warren, the old watchman, who acted and spoke thus. His nap having ended, he was striving to do his duty, still he would have been no match for the younger and more wiry antagonist had he not received help in turn.



Sent him rolling backwards.

Bates, having secured his man, also sprang over the counter, into the inclosure, to learn how Morton was getting on. There was enough light for him to grasp the situation at a glance. The motionless figure of his comrade stretched full length upon the floor led him to believe that he had been killed. It will be understood, therefore, that when Bates brought down his truncheon on the head of Joe Nash, a second blow would have been superfluous. An instant sufficed to secure him against doing any further harm, then Bates gave attention to Morton. He speedily saw that he was badly hurt, though to what extent he could not determine.

"Go and fetch help, Warren, as quickly as you can," said Bates to the watchman.

"Yes, sir. Gracious! If I'd ha' been a second later, it 'ud ha' been all over with him, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, yes. Off with you."

Warren lost no time in obeying commands. He was astonished when he found a strange key in the door.

"How'd that got there?" he asked himself, drawing it out and inspecting it by the gaslight. "It ain't mine, for that's in my pocket."

He thought he did a clever thing when he used his own key to fasten the door, and flung the other one away upon reaching the street.

"That put's an end to any ugly remarks about that," was the satisfied conclusion, though had he thought a little quicker, he must have seen that it could not have mended matters.

The Superintendent and Burton were in another part of the town, but of the half-dozen policemen doing night-duty in Middlewick one was speedily found by the watchman, who, upon hearing what had happened, quickly went to his comrades' assistance. A doctor was secured and taken to the bank. It was strange that the encounter within the building had not become generally known. The only persons found there were the policemen and the two prisoners.

An examination of the wounded constable showed that he had been hard hit, but the doctor pronounced the wound not necessarily dangerous. Morton had rallied and was sitting up, coolly talking over the occurrence.

"I tell you," he said, with a faint smile, as he looked at the watchman, "if it hadn't have been for you, Warren, I should have resigned for good this evening."

They were sweet words to the old man and were heard by all. They were certain to be repeated to Mr. Bryant and, if not too much explanation was demanded by him, were likely to restore his old situation to Warren.

A conveyance was secured and Morton was taken home, where, it may as well be said, he eventually recovered and received a handsome reward, as did his companion, for his bravery in defending the Middlewick bank against the burglars.

The latter, sullen and refusing to speak, were safely lodged in the station about ten minutes before Sam Birch was placed in durance by the Superintendent and Burton.

(To be continued.)

Read the Great War Story in *Pearson's Weekly.*

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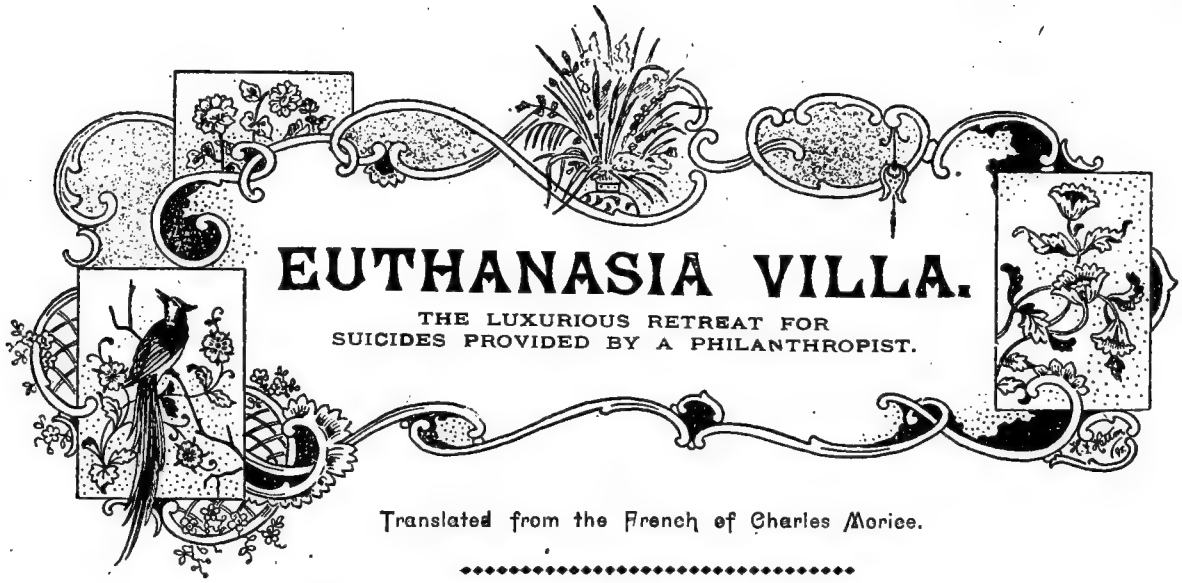

EUTHANASIA VILLA.

THE LUXURIOUS RETREAT FOR SUICIDES PROVIDED BY A PHILANTHROPIST.

Translated from the French of Charles Monice.

In one of the principal squares of the city stood the great philanthropic establishment founded by Mr. Richard Utterex. Its majestic front was no less than two hundred feet long; there were six rows of balcony windows, and over the principal entrance a sign in gilt letters announced that this splendid building was "Euthanasia Villa."

It was to this institution that those who were disgusted with existence came to seek euthanasia; of course it was intended exclusively for the disgusted ones with money, for those who were not blessed with this world's goods could carry out their sinister designs without the assistance offered to the guests of Euthanasia Villa. But, for the unhappy possessors of millions, Mr. Richard Utterex was really a benefactor.

Each day at least three disheartened mortals came and knocked at his door; this is only a figurative way of speaking, for the door remained continually open. This is how the business was conducted.

One day a young man entered the office. Two clerks at once rose to meet him. The stranger advanced three steps. Naturally he was very pale and tottering. An easy-chair was pushed towards him; he dropped into it, and caressed, from time to time, the small carved death's-heads that ornamented the end of the arms. He threw a glance around the office, which was hung in black cloth.

The clerks made the young man a low bow in an automatic fashion; then, without giving him time to reply to their polite salutation or to explain the object of his visit, one of them asked him, in an obsequious voice:

"What manner of death have you chosen?"

Prepared as he must have been for some such question, the desperate young man could not repress an involuntary shudder. The clerks appeared to be much surprised, and, as the guest did not become calm at once, they went up to him with the same automatic step, and, without saying a word, looked at him. This proceeding had the desired effect. The young man felt that he was in a well-conducted establishment, and this reassured him.

One of the clerks said: "Do you wish to see the prospectus?"

"I beg your pardon," said the young man; but he quickly continued: "The prospectus? Oh, yes, certainly, the prospectus."

Then, with the discreet manner of a waiter in a fashionable restaurant who seeks to learn the guest's preference—Pomard or Sauterne—the clerk handed the young man a richly-bound album, wherein were described the different modes of death furnished by the house. The enumeration of these various methods plunged the reader into a shuddering astonishment. At first he ran over them with his finger rather than with his eye, stopping here and there, amused by the marginal illustrations; then he began again, reading seriously this time, without, however, coming to a decision.

Certainly, hanging had its charms; but what poetry there was about asphyxia with flowers! The soul departs with the breath of the tube-rose! And the poisons, rooms Nos. 4 to 10—a vast choice!

But here are the lost diseases! Ah, the lost diseases! To contract by artificial means leprosy or the black death, to offer to the practitioners of the present day, whom the disappearance of those "affections" renders inconsolable, the occasion of studying them "from the life," to carry away in dying the consolation that you leave in your remains a whole field of delicate experiences! That is without doubt incomparably more noble than death by laughter, the simple idea of which gives you a nausea, and dishonours the ingenious enumeration of Mr. Richard Utterex. But there are ill-natured persons who would be offended at this prospect, however glorious it may be, of having these verses written on their bodies; they prefer a sort of aristocracy of silence. What could be better than the lancing of veins in a warm bath?

"Have you made your choice?" insinuated the clerk in a low voice, without changing his attitude.

"But there is such a variety!" replied the desperate young man.

The clerk accepted the compliment with a polite smile.

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"You must yourself admit," continued the stranger, "that hesitation is excusable under the circumstances."

"Perhaps it would be well to visit the establishment?"

"That will suit me exactly."

"Whenever it will please you to do so."

For the first time the two clerks broke off their work; one opened the office door and stepped aside to allow the guest to pass, and the other indicated the way with an almost affectionate wave of the hand. The young man's first impulse was to obey; but at the second step he changed his mind, and said timidly:

"I should first like to know how much—in short, the terms."

"The price, sir," replied from the end of the room the voice of Mr. Richard Utterex himself, who had just come in, "varies with the class of accommodation desired, and guests pay only on leaving the house."

The young stranger, seeming still undecided, his conductor gently placed his hand upon his arm and invited him to follow. Giving up all thought of resistance he obeyed, and began his tour of Euthanasia Villa.

In the large vestibule of a spacious staircase the visitor was shown, with a reverential bow, which he involuntarily imitated, a large statue of the great Schopenhauer, the patron of the institution. Then they proceeded upstairs.

A door opened; it was the chamber called the Pistol Shot. Like all the other rooms in the house, this was light and elegantly furnished in modern style. As in all the others, too, its principal ornament was a handsome coffin in carved ebony; the cover was placed crosswise on the box, as though awaiting its occupant. There were several divans and reclining chairs about the room; the bed was in rosewood.

"Everything is conducted here with the most perfect discretion," said the guide: "A system of electrical currents, moved by the report, divides in two, lengthwise, whatever piece of furniture the guest has chosen to commit suicide on; a long basket receives the body before it has had time to stain the furniture or the floor with a single spot. Kindly observe that the walls are upholstered with a thickness of four mattresses, so that it is impossible for anyone on the other side of the partition to hear the faintest sound, however powerful the firearm used, even though it were a small Krupp cannon, such as you see there in the corner. Guests have all the time they wish; we never hurry them. Each room is provided with a library abundantly furnished with the most melancholy works. Schopenhauer has been translated for us into all the languages of the old and new worlds.

"Those ten shelves are full of novels that end badly. Upon the eleventh preachers of various religions sound the praises of death. Some serious philosophers and a few poets, Lucretius and Leopardi, occupy the twelfth shelf. As for the conveniences of life (before departing), they leave nothing to be desired. A telephone in each chamber communicates with the office. Orders for meals or whatever else is wanted are executed with the utmost promptness by faceless automatons; we keep a whole company of them here. This delicate attention on Mr. Utterex's part is generally very highly appreciated, for people who are so disgusted with life that they are ready to commit suicide wish to see the human face no more. Finally, will you kindly examine the racks? there you will find either terrible, elegant, or brutal instruments of sudden death."

The visitor took down a pistol and examined it.

"Be careful; they are all loaded."

One by one the stranger saw all the philanthropic ideas imagined by Mr. Richard Utterex. In the Asphyxia chamber, after having explained the perfect obstructions that prevent air from entering when once the door is closed, the clerk proposed to the visitor a brief experience, so that he might judge for himself of its efficiency. This offer, which is rarely accepted, was declined, as charcoal and laughing-gas have but little attraction except as a last resort. Tube-roses tempt more, most of the suicide neophytes being afflicted with sentimentalism. Large masses of fresh flowers were everywhere about the chamber, harmonising with the designs of the carpet and the hangings.

"If you would like a special essence you can have it, for we cultivate all kinds of plants in the large conservatory adjoining the hotel."

"No; it is very complete as it is."

And the inspection was resumed.

The stranger stopped with some curiosity on the third floor, at a landing where there were three doors, each one bearing a sign: "For Science."

The guide pretended to pass by, at the same time watching the astonished young man out of the corner of his eye.

"Well?" queried the stranger.

"Those rooms are occupied, and they are often taken, I must say, to the credit of humanity."

"How so? What takes place within?"

"Mr. Utterex here offers an opportunity of rendering by one's death a great service to human kind. Here in the Experimental Chamber magnanimous individuals, who care nothing about their lives, experiment on substances, to prove to Science whether they are harmless or toxical; others submit themselves to cruel surgical operations and successive mutilations that give the exact measurement of human sensibility. Some days ago a young Russian had a quarter of his cranium sawed off; he survived exactly three hours and fifty minutes. The house doctor, Mr. O'Neil, was wild with joy. 'What a splendid experiment!' he cried."

The stranger tried to share Mr. O'Neil's enthusiasm, but his teeth chattered.

"The Stake Chamber—the death of Hercules! The walls and the ceiling are in precious paste, and are fireproof. The quartering—all you have to do is to place your ankles and wrists in these collars, held to the walls by electric bands. This stool, upon which the person sits, rests upon a button, the pressure on which starts four equal and contrary currents. Submitted to the action of forces rigorously symmetrical, the limbs are at once torn apart. The Decapitation Chamber——"

The visitor remained stupefied at the sight of a marvellous guillotine, in cedar wood, with a keen and gleaming knife. The guide, with the half-smiling manner that he would use to beg you to excuse the trick of a child, opened a wardrobe.

"We reserve here, for the use of imaginative persons, the costume of Louis the Sixteenth. Besides, the blade, in falling, touches a music-box, which at once imitates the historical rolling of Santeree's drums. The Strangulation Chamber—two bow-strings fixed to a small board at the height of the bed, fly to the ceiling and remain there if one puts the weight of his feet upon it. Electricity also plays the principal *rôle* in 'death by laughter.' This is a concealed method; a bed that looks comfortable and invites you to sleep, but as soon as a living person is stretched upon it he is

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riveted by irresistible grapnels, while the illusive couch is instantly decomposed into a multitude of minute brushes, very soft and yet very stiff, which run over the patient's body imitating the pricklings of millions of insects, stopping by preference on the joints, and never ceasing to play strange and skipping marches upon the soles of the feet—but what is the matter, sir?"

The young visitor's face was white; he had slowly tottered back to the wall and was leaning against it for support. Suddenly it seemed to him—pure hallucination, of course—that the artificial insects just described by his guide were making wild excursions from his head to his feet.

"What manner of death have you chosen?"

The stranger was feverishly agitated. "I cannot—I shall prefer——"

"To visit the establishment again, perhaps?"

"No, no!"

"However, you must choose some——"

"Yes, of course, I must; it is evident——"

He gradually regained his self-possession, and at the same time his love of life. He assumed not without effort an easy air, and an appearance of indifference to the physical terrors at which in reality he still inwardly trembled. Suddenly, as though illumined with an idea he said:

"Let us go downstairs."

When they reached the third floor he pointed to the Experimental Chamber, and said:

"You say it is occupied?"

"Yes, it is occupied."

"What a pity! Well," and the stranger affected to contemplate longingly the forbidden threshold—"well, I will wait. Let us descend."

In passing before Schopenhauer's statue he could not help looking it straight in the face, with a sort of defiance.

At the office he was received by Mr. Utterex himself, who welcomed him with a gentle smile.

"The room that I have selected," began the young man, with an easy air——

"The Experimental Chamber?"

"Yes."

"It is occupied," said Mr. Utterex, still smiling, and at the same time offering the visitor a thin sheet of bristol board with gilt edges, on which was written:

Mr. X. to Richard Utterex. Dr.:

To restoring love of life.....£1,000.

LOST:

A Strange Story of a Mysterious Disappearance.

How beautiful she was in her superb calmness; so graceful, so mild, and yet so majestic! Ah, I was a younger man then, of course, than I am now, and possibly more impressionable; but I thought her the most perfect creature I had ever beheld. And, even now, looking back through the gathering mists of time and the chilling frosts of advancing age, and recalling what she was, I endorse that earlier sentiment—she lives in my memory now, as she lived in my presence then, as the most perfect creature ever beheld.

I had gone the round of all the best boarding-houses in town, when at last I went to Mrs. Honeywold's, and there, in her small, unpretending establishment, I, General Leslie Anchester, having been subdued, I trust to a humble and proper state of mind by my past experiences, agreed to take up my abode.

And it was there I first met her! Here was the early maturity of loveliness, perfect in repose, with mild, thoughtful eyes, intelligent and tender, a trifle sad at times, but lighting up with quick brilliancy as some new object met her view, or some vivid thought darted its lightning flash through her brain—for she was wonderfully quick of perception—with an exquisite figure. She spent little on dress (I was sure she was not wealthy); but though there was little variety, her dress was exquisitely neat and in perfect good taste of some soft glossy fabric, smooth as silk and lustrous as satin, and of the softest shade of silver-grey, that colour so beautiful in itself, and so becoming to beautiful wearers; simply made, but fitting with a nicety, more like the work of nature than of art, to every curve and outline of that full and stately figure, and finished off round her white throat with something scarcely whiter. She never wore ornaments of any kind—no chain, no brooch, no ring, or pin.

She had twins—two beautiful, blue-eyed young things, wonderfully like herself—little shy, graceful creatures, always playful. She never spoke of her own affairs, and affable as she was, and gentle in manner, there was something about her which repelled intrusion.

When, after some weeks' residence there, I had gained the goodwill of my simple-minded but kindly little landlady, I cautiously ventured to ask her to gratify my not, I think, unnatural curiosity: but I found, to my surprise, she knew but little more than I did myself.

"She came to me," she said, "just at the end of the evening, one cold, rainy night, and I could not refuse to give her shelter—at least for the night, or till she could do better. I did not think of her remaining; but she is so pretty, and gentle, and innocent-looking, I could not turn her out of my house: could I now? I know I am a silly in such ways; but what could I do?"

"But is it possible," I said, "that she has remained here ever since, and you know nothing more about her?"

"No more than you do yourself, General," said Mrs. Honeywold. "I do not even know where she lived before she came here. I cannot question her, and now, indeed, I have become so fond of her I should not be willing to part with her; and I would not turn her and her little ones out of the house for the world!"

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Further conversation elicited the fact that she was not a boarder, but that she and her little ones were dependent upon Mrs. Honeywold's charity.

One fine summer day I had made an appointment with a friend to drive out to his place in the suburbs and dine with him, returning in the evening. When I came down in the afternoon, dressed for my excursion, I went into the dining-room to tell Mrs. Honeywold she need not wait for me. As I came through the parlour she was there alone. She was sitting on the sofa. A book lay near her, but I do not think she had been reading. She was sitting perfectly still, as if lost in reverie, and her eyes looked heavy with sleep or thought. But as I passed out of the room I looked back. I saw she had risen to her feet, and standing with her graceful figure drawn up to its full height, she was looking after me, with a look which I flatter myself was a look of interest. Ah, how well I remembered that look!

The day had been a beautiful one, though sultry; but in the early evening we had a heavy thunder-shower, the violence of the summer rain delaying my return to town for an hour or two; and when the rain ceased, the evening was still starless, cloudy, and damp; and as I drove back to town I remembered that the night air, although somewhat freshened by the rain, was warm and heavy with the scent of unseen flowers.

It was late when I reached the quiet street where I had taked up my abode, and as I mounted the steps I involuntarily felt for my latchkey, but to my surprise I found the hall-door not only unfastened, but a little way opened.

"Why, how is this, Mrs. Honeywold?" I said, as my landlady met me in the hall. "Do you know that your street door was left open?"

"Yes," she said quietly, "I know it."

"But is it safe?" I asked, as I turned to lock the door; "and so late, too."

"I do not think there is any danger," she said. "I was on the watch; I was in the hall waiting myself."

"Not waiting for me, I hope?" said I; "that was surely unnecessary."

"No, not for you," she answered, "I presume you can take care of yourself; but," she added, in a low voice, "she is out, and I was waiting to let her in."

"Out at this time of night!—that seems strange. Where has she gone?"

"I do not know."

"And how long as she been gone?" I asked, as I hung up my hat.

"I cannot tell just what time she went out," she said; "I know she was in the garden with the little ones, and came in just before tea. After they had had their suppers and gone to bed, I saw her in the parlour alone, and when I came into the room again, she was gone, and she has not returned, and I——"

"Oh, then, she went out before the rain, did she?"

"Yes, sir, sometime before the rain."

"Oh, then, that explains it; she was probably caught out by the rain, and took shelter somewhere and has been persuaded to stay. There is nothing to be alarmed at; you had better not wait up another minute."

"But I don't like to shut her out, General; I should not sleep a wink."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" I said. "Go to bed, you silly woman; you will hear her when she comes, of course, and can come down and let her in." And so saying, I retired to my own room.

The next morning at breakfast, I noticed that my landlady was looking pale and troubled.

"Well, Mrs. Honeywold," I said, with assumed cheerfulness, as she handed my coffee to me, "how long did you have to sit up? What time did she come in?"

"She did not come in all night, General," said my landlady, in a troubled voice. "She has not come home yet, and I am very anxious about it."

"No need of that, I trust," I said reassuringly; "she will come this morning, no doubt."

"I don't know. I wish I was sure of that. I don't know what to make of it. I don't understand it. She never did so before. How she could have stayed out, and left those two blessed little things all night; and she always seemed such a tender, loving mother, too; I don't understand it."

When I returned at dinner-time, I found matters still worse. She had not been seen. My poor landlady was almost in hysterics, though she tried hard to control herself.

To satisfy her, I went off to consult the police. My mission was not encouraging. They promised to do their best, but gave slight hopes of a successful result.

So sad, weary, and discouraged, I returned home, only to learn there were no tidings of the missing one.

"I give her up now," said my weeping landlady; "I shall never see her again. She is lost for ever, and these two poor, pretty little creatures——"

"By-the-way," I said, "if she never does return, what will you do with them?"

"Keep them!" said the generous and impulsive little woman.

"I wanted to say, if she does not return, I will, if you like, relieve you of them. My sister, who lives with me, and keeps my house, is a very tender-hearted woman."

"No! no!" sobbed the poor woman. "I cannot part with them. I am a poor woman, it is true, but not too poor to give them a home: and while I have a bit and a sup for myself they shall have one too. Their poor mother left them here, and if she ever does return she shall find them here. If she never returns, then——"

And she never did return, and no tidings of her fate ever reached us. If she was enticed away by artful blandishments, or kidnapped by cruel violence, we know not. But I honestly believe the latter. Either way, it was her fatal beauty that led her to destruction; for, as I have said before, she was the most perfect creature, the most beautiful Maltese cat that I ever beheld in my life. I am sure she never deserted her two pretty little kittens of her own accord. And if, poor dumb thing, she was stolen and killed for her beautiful fur, still I say, as I said at first, she was "more sinned against than sinning."

Edith Summers.

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LEGENDS OF WOLFVILLE.

BY "DAN QUINN."

Wolfville is a Cattleman's Settlement in Arizona, and the Characters in these Legends are Cowboys.

No. 8.—Short Creek Dave Gets Religion.

Short Creek Dave was a leading citizen of the little camp of Wolfville. In fact his friends would not have scrupled at the claim that Short Creek Dave was a leading citizen of Arizona. So when the news came over from Tucson that Short Creek, who had been paying that metropole a breezy visit, had in an inadvertent moment strolled within the confines of a Gospel meeting then and there being waged, and suffered conversion, Wolfville became a prey to some excitement.

"I tells him," says Tutt, who brought back the tidings, "not to go tamperin' 'round this ere meetin'. But he have done it. He jeest keeps pervadin' about the goin' place, and looks like as I can't get him away. Says I: 'Dave, you don't understand this ere game they're turnin' inside, so you jeest keep out a whole lot; you'll be safer.' But warnin's ain't no good; Short Creek Dave don't regard 'em a little bit."

"This yere Short Creek is allers speshul obstinate that away," said the driver of the Tucson stage, "and he gets them moods frequent, when he jest won't stay where he is, nor go anywhere else. I don't wonder you don't do nuthin' with him."

"Well," said Cherokee Hall, "I reckon Short Creek knows his business. I ain't myself none astonished much by these yere news. I knows him to do some mighty funny things; sech as breakin' a pair of jacks to draw to a three-flush, and it seems like he's just a pursooin' of his usual system in this here religious break. However, he'll be at Wolfville to-morrow, and then we'll know a mighty sight more about it; pending which, let's licker, Mr. Barkeep; please inquire out the nose colour for the band."

The people of Wolfville there present saw no reason to pursue the discussion so pleasantly ended, and drew near the bar. The debate took place in the Gold Mine Saloon; so, as one observed on the issuance of Cherokee's invitation, "They were not far from centres." Cherokee himself was a suave courtier of fortune, who presided behind his own faro game, and, reputed to possess a straight deal box, held high place in the Wolfville breast.

The next day came, and Wolfville began to suffer increased excitement. This feeling grew as the time for the coming of the Tucson stage approached. An outsider might not have detected this warmth. It found its evidences in the unusual activity of monte, high ball, stud, and kindred relaxations; while faro, too, showed a boom spirit, and white chips, which were a commodity ordinarily disposed of at the rate of two bits per white chip, had, under the heightened pulse of the public, gone, in some games, to the dizzy pinnacle of 25 dollars a stack. At last, out of the grey and heated plain, a cloud of dust announced the coming of the stage. Stacks were cashed and games cleaned up, and presently the male population of Wolfville was in the street, to catch as early a glimpse as might be of the newly converted one.

"I don't reckon now he's goin' to look sech a whole lot different neither," said Faro Nell, as she stood near Cherokee Hall, awaiting the coming coach.

"I wonder would it do to ask Dave for a drink?" said Tutt, in a tone of vague inquiry.

"Shore," said Old Monte, "an' why not?"

"Oh, nuthin', why not?" replied Tutt, as he watched the stage come up. "Only he's nacherally a mighty peevish man, that away, an' I don't suppose how his enterin' the fold has reduced the restlessness of that six-shooter of hes'n none whatever."

"All the same," said Cherokee Hall, "politeness among gentlemen should allers be observed; an' I asks this yere Short Creek to drink as soon as ever he comes; an' I ain't lookin' to see him take it none invidious, neither."

With a rattle of chains and a creaking of straps, the stage and its six high-headed horses pulled up at the post-office door. The mail bags were kicked off, the Wells-Fargo boxes were tumbled into the street, and, in the general rattle and crush, the eagerly-expected Short Creek Dave stepped off. There was possibly a more eager scanning of his person in the thought that the great inward change might have its outward evidences; a more vigorous shaking of his hand, perhaps; but beyond those, curious interest did not go. Not a word nor a look touching Short Creek's religious exploits betrayed the question which was tugging at the Wolfville heart. Wolfville was too polite, and then, again, Wolfville was too courteous. Next to horse-stealing, curiosity is the greatest crime of the frontier, and the one most ferociously resented. Wolfville just expressed its polite satisfaction in Short Creek Dave's return, and took it out in hand-shaking. The only incident worth a record was when Cherokee Hall said in a tone of bland friendship:

"I don't reckon now, Dave, you're objectin' to whisky after your ride?"

"I ain't done so usual," said Dave cheerfully, "but this yere time, Cherokee, I'll leave to pass. Jest confidin' the truth to you all, I'm a little bit off on them beverages jest now, an' I'm allowin' to tell you the win an' lose thereof a little later on. An' now if you all will excuse me, I'll canter over to the O. K. House an' feed myself some."

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"I shore reckon he's converted," said Tutt, as he shook his head gloomily. "I wouldn't care none, only it's me as gets Dave to go over to Tucson this yere time; an' so I feels responsible."

"Well, what of it?" said Old Monte, with a sudden burst of energy. "I don't see no kick comin' to anyone, nor why this yere's to be regarded. If Dave wants to be religious and sing them hymns a heap you bet that's his American right. I'll jest gamble a hundred dollars Dave comes out all even an' protects his game clear through."

The next day the excitement had begun to subside, when a notice posted on the post-office door caused it to rise again. The notice announced that Short Creek Dave would preach that evening in the big warehouse of the New York Store.

"I reckon we better all go," said Cherokee Hall. "I'm goin' to turn my box an' close the game at 7.30 sharp; seeing as how several ladies is due to sing a lot in the choir. We might jest as well turn out and give Short Creek the best turn in the wheel, jest to start him along the new trail."

"That's whatever," said Tutt who had recovered from his first gloom, and now entered into the affair with spirit.

That evening the New York warehouse was as brilliantly lighted as a wild abundance of candles could make it. All Wolfville was there. As a result of a discussion held in private with Short Creek Dave, and by that convert's own request, Cherokee Hall took a seat at the dry-good's box which was to serve as a pulpit, to assist in the conduct of the meeting. The congregation disposed itself about on the improvised benches which the ardour of Tutt had provided. At eight o'clock Short Dave walked up the space in the centre reserved as an aisle in company with Cherokee Hall, this latter gentleman carrying a gigantic Bible, which he placed on the dry goods box. Rapping gently on the box for order, Cherokee addressed the meeting briefly:

"This yere is a prayer meeting of the camp," said Cherokee, "and I am asked by Dave to preside, which I accordin' do. No one need make any mistake about this yere gatherin' on account of my presence. This yere is a religious meetin'. I'm not myself given that way, but I'm allers glad to meet people what is, and see that they have a chance in for their ante, and their game is protected. I am one of those, too, who believes a little religion wouldn't hurt this camp much. Next to a lynchin' I don't know of a more excellent influence in a Western camp than these yere meetin's. I ain't expectin' to be in on this play none myse'f, an' jest set here in the name of order an' for the purpose of a square deal. I now introduce to you a gentleman who is liable to be as good a preacher as ever banged a Bible — your townsman, Short Creek Dave."

"Mr. President," said Short Creek Dave, turning to Cherokee.

"Short Creek Dave," said Cherokee sententiously, at the same time bowing gravely in recognition.

"And, ladies and gentlemen of Wolfville," continued Dave, "I shall open this yere play with a prayer."

The prayer proceeded. It was fervent and earnest, and replete with unique expressions and personal allusions. In these last, the congregation took a breathless interest. Towards the close Dave bent his energies in supplication for the regeneration of Texas Thompson, whom he represented in his orisons as a good man, but living a misguided and vicious life. The audience was listening with grave and approving attention when there came an interruption. It was Texas Thompson who rose to address the chair.

"Mr. President," said Texas Thompson, drawing a long breath, "I object to Dave a-tacklin' of the Redeemer for me, and a-makin' of statements which aim to show I'm nothin' more'n a felon. This yere talk is liable to queer me up on high, an I objects to it."

"Prayer is a free-for-all game, and thar ain't no limit on to it," said Cherokee. "The chair, therefore, decided agin' the p'int of order."

"Well, then," rejoined Texas Thompson, "a-waivin' of the usual appeal to the house, all I have got to say is this: I'm a peaceful man, an' have allers been the friend of Short Creek Dave, and I even assists at an' promotes this yere meetin'. But I gives notice yere now, if Short Creek Dave keeps on a-malignin' of me to the Great White throne as heretofore, I'll shore call on him to make them statements good with his gun as soon as the contreebution box is passed."

"The chair informs the gent," said Cherokee, with vast dignity, "that Dave, bein' now an evangelist, can't make no gun plays nor go canterin' out to shoot as of a former day. However, the chair recognises the rights of the gent, an' standin' as the chair does, in the position of look-out to this yere game, the chair will be ready to back his play with a 'Colt's 45' as soon as ever church is out, in person."

"Mr. President," said Dave, "jest let me have a word in yere. I've looked up things a little, an' I finds that the Apostle Peter, who was a main guy of them days, scrupled not to fight. Now, I follers Peter's lead in this. I might add, too, that while it gives me pain to be obliged to shoot up Deacon Thompson in the first half of the meetin' we holds in Wolfville, still the path of duty is cl'ar, an' I shall shorely walk therein, fearin' nothin'. I therefore moves we adjourn ten minutes, an' there is plenty of moon outside, if the chair will lend me its gun—I not packin' of sech frivolities no more, a-regardin' of 'em in the light of sinful bluffs—I shall trust to Providence to convince Texas Thompson that he's away off in this matter. You bet I knows my business."

"Unless objection is heard, this yere meetin' will stand adjourned for fifteen minutes," said Cherokee, at the same time passing over his six-shooter.

Thirty paces were stepped off, and the men stood up in the moonlight street, while the congregation made a line of admiration on the sidewalk.

"I counts one, two, three, and drops the contribution box," said Cherokee, "wharupon you all fires and advances at will. Be you all ready?"

The shooting began on the word, and when the smoke cleared away, Texas Thompson had a bullet in his shoulder.

"The congregation will now take its seats in the store," said Cherokee, "and the deal will be resoomed. Two of you'll carry Texas over to the hotel, and fix him up all right. This yere shows concloosive that Short Creek Dave is licensed from above to pray for whoever he pleases, and I'm mighty glad it occurs. It's shorely goin' to promote confidence in his ministrations."

The concourse was duly in its seats when Dave reached the pulpit.

"I will now resoome my intercessions for our fortunate brother, Texas Thompson," said he.

"I knowed he would," said Cherokee, as two dollars came over from the wounded man to the contribution box. "Texas Thompson is an honourable man, an' you can gamble religious truths always assert themselves."

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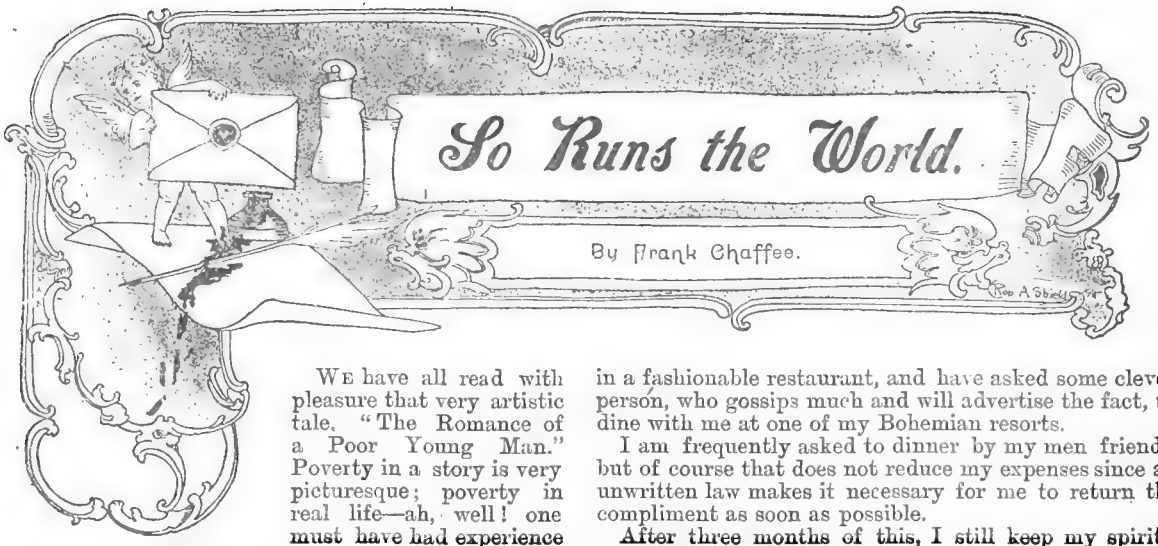

We have all read with pleasure that very artistic tale, "The Romance of a Poor Young Man." Poverty in a story is very picturesque; poverty in real life—ah, well! one must have had experience of it to know what it really is.

I write this as the first realising sense comes upon me of what it means to be poor. It is now three months since I lost my position. I had lived up to the last penny of my salary—lived luxuriously, in fact. My rooms were as smart and as artistic as any in town. I was very much in the cultivated Bohemian set, and one might always meet at my apartments, not the greatest, perhaps, but those on the road to greatness, in the field of art and letters. I was known to dabble in literary work myself, and my small achievements, having some glitter about them, were much overrated by everyone except the editors to whom I tried to sell them, generally without success.

I look back on all this as I write, and do not regret it. It was an education, this meeting and being surrounded by witty, brainy people; and as for the money—ye gods! What is money for if not to buy us the things we want? The prudent ones will say my course was foolish and improvident; those wiser ones, wise with the wisdom of simplicity, will say I did well; in any case it is in the past.

The firm by which I had been employed went out of business, and I found myself stranded. A man of thirty, who has held his head high, may not go out and look for a position, like an office boy. He may let it be known that he is available, and then wait to be sought. I waited, times were hard, and so few firms were looking for experienced men, or willing to pay such a salary as I could accept.

I have managed to keep my rooms, by selling some valuable scarf pins and other jewellery owned. My friends generally suppose me to have an income, or at least to be making a good deal with my pen; and since I do not visibly curtail my expenses, it is a reasonable supposition. My economies have been in the things which people have not seen. I have risen late, made coffee in my rooms, and with it I have taken a roll or a biscuit or two. Having breakfasted so late and so plenfully, I naturally take no luncheon. At night I urge my Bohemian tastes as an excuse for dining at the cheapest of the *table d'hôte* resorts.

The stipend that I do obtain from some paltry newspaper work serves to pay these expenses. Occasionally I have been fortunate enough to sell a story or a sketch, and then I have allowed myself to be seen at breakfast in a fashionable restaurant, and have asked some clever person, who gossips much and will advertise the fact, to dine with me at one of my Bohemian resorts.

I am frequently asked to dinner by my men friends, but of course that does not reduce my expenses since an unwritten law makes it necessary for me to return the compliment as soon as possible.

After three months of this, I still keep my spirits, outwardly; still am able to say laughingly, when questioned:

"I don't know whether I shall go back to a commercial life or not; Bohemia is very fascinating."

Three months! It is becoming a strain physical and mental. How can I keep my rooms? I have no more jewellery to sell. I fear to sell anything else, lest it should be noticed—and my position is almost entirely dependent upon my rooms.

* * * * *

I have sold an old etching for enough to pay my rent for another month. One of my newspaper outlets was closed to-day. The editor, who is a good friend of mine said: "To tell you the truth, old chap, I have given your column to a poor devil who really needs the money."

I went away and called at another newspaper office. I boldly told the editor I wanted a position. He laughed as he said:

"Oh, your pen is too clever for hack work—you would better stick to special articles."

"Can you use some specials?" I asked.

"Well, not just at present," he replied, "but do us something in your fresh, breezy style, and we will use it as soon as we can."

I have tried to write to-night, tried to be fresh and breezy. One might as well try to fly with a mill-stone tied to one's neck. Who was it said a man could do his best literary work with the wolf howling at the door? Whoever it was, I'll wager he had dined well when he had said it.

* * * * *

Hurrah! I have received a cheque for a story I sold a month ago. I had quite forgotten it. To be sure it is only a small amount. A few months ago I should have spent it for a box of cigars, and have thought no more about it; now I must stretch it to the utmost, but, at least, I will ask Carlos to dine with me once. Good, true-hearted Carlos, he wonders why he sees so little of me nowadays. I tell him I am writing, that I am doing some serious work. Carlos, old chap, did you but know the truth, did you but know that your friend whose lighter vein so entertains you is sometimes hungry, how your heart would ache, and how you would open your purse and insist upon sharing your plenty!

Why is it I may not take the money I so much need

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from Carlos, who has plenty, and who loves me better than any brother? A man may not take money that he does not earn. I would like to take money from Carlos, and yet there is something within me that will not let me.

* * * * *

I took Carlos to dinner last night. We had a nice little dinner and a bottle of wine. It made a sad hole in my little capital; but Carlos was so happy, and said it seemed so like old times, and then we came up to my rooms and smoked and chatted. Carlos smoked his college pipe, a great meerschaum, which he had spent his four college years in colouring. When he got up to go home, he looked at the pipe tenderly, and, turning to me, said:

"Old chap, I want to give you this pipe. I know you like it, and I want you to have it."

Dear old Carlos, he loves that pipe better than anything he owns; and so he gives it to me, whom he loves even better. Ah, me! and even to him I may not tell the truth about myself. I must arrange that Carlos shall one day have his pipe back again, and if things do not shape themselves soon in a better way for me, I shall—well, I don't know what I shall do.

* * * * *

To-night I am dazed. I have to-day been searching for a position—for something to do, for anything by which a gentleman may earn his bread. I have urged my ability, have offered to do anything that a gentleman may. I have called on every one of influence in the commercial and literary world. They decline to see that I need what I ask for; I cannot impress them with my seriousness. Great Heavens! Is it only the creatures who wear their hearts on their sleeves, and who shed tears in public, that can be taken seriously? Is sympathy given only to noisy anguish? Is a helping hand held out only to him who whimpers about his troubles and whines for help?

* * * * *

I find that I can give up sugar and cream with my coffee in the morning. It saves quite a little, and as the coffee is less palatable, one does not drink so much, so that also is a saving. I take my dinner in my rooms now. There is rather a sameness in each day's bill of fare, but I dare say it is healthful; and after all, one should eat to live, not live to eat. I wonder how long a man can live on such fare?

* * * * *

I am getting deplorably thin. I fancy it is having so much uncertainty on my mind. My clothes are really absurd, they hang so loosely on me. Carlos came back from a yatching trip to-day, looking brown as a berry. He looked at me a minute, and then said:

"Jove, old man, you've grown thin. I suppose you are working like a slave, and I dare say you have ruined your appetite. I don't believe you eat enough."

Good Carlos, I could not tell him how right he was, nor why.

"Look here, old chap, come away and dine with me. I'll bet I'll order a dinner you can eat," said Carlos.

A man who has not the price of a dinner for himself may not accept a dinner from his friend, so I could only say:

"Thank you, no, Carlos. I have some work to do. I'll get a bite later;" and Carlos was hurt and left me.

* * * * *

Being very poor was harder than I thought, and I was getting so desperately weak that I seemed to be losing my grip—but I don't think that any one guesses how poor I am. My stock of clothes holds out well, and I think they will last as long as I—as long as usual. I seem to be drifting towards something, I don't know what.

* * * * *

Another month has gone, and my rent is far overdue. The landlord is very considerate, and had given me ten day's grace. I do not seem to have any spirit left. I was severely criticised to-day at one newspaper office where I still have a little work—they say that my work has lost its snap and brilliancy. I could not tell them that a hungry man could not be brilliant, and I promised to get back to the old vein.

* * * * *

I wonder what men do who are as poor as I, and have others dependent upon them. Thank God, I have no one—no one to whom I am everything. If anything should happen to me, a lot of people would be madly sorry for a few days, and say:

"Clever chap, but lacked force." "Brilliant, perhaps but oh, so ill-balanced!" Then they would forget me. Carlos? Well, Carlos would care, yes, and grieve truly for the friend that he loved, without even understanding.

* * * * *

My ten days' grace with the rent is up. I must give up my rooms, but I will give them up in my own way. I have been reading in something of Kipling's how the chaps in India speak of dying as "going out." I think I will "go out." I think I will "go out."

I don't like the idea of suicide. I have always held it cowardly and weak. I have said that a man who took his own life was a fool—well, I was right, he is a fool, therefore he should die.

I wonder if I have strength enough to carry me to the river that will be kind to me and tell no tales. I must destroy this journal first, or all my efforts to keep my secret will be lost, and they will know I have been hungry.

I don't understand this peculiar faintness that comes over me now and then. It must be because I have not eaten anything to-day. Ah, well, many better men have fared worse.

"Going out." I like that phrase; and yet, going out into what? Going out into what? Going where? Oh, I do not know! I will not go out into an unknown country. Better bear the ills we have than to fly to those——

* * * * *

The papers of the next morning contained the following notice:

Suddenly, of heart failure, John Carlisle, aged thirty years. Mr. Carlisle, whose death occurred yesterday, will be much missed in literary and artistic circles, where he was a great favourite. He has been a contributor to most of our periodicals, and wielded a brilliant pen. Mr. Carlisle was a man of wealth and good social position. He has been failing in health for some time.

It was Carlos who came in late that night to find his friend lying, with the pen still in his fingers, pointing towards the unfinished sentence. No one but Carlos has ever seen that journal, and it is Carlos now who writes it here, that those who run may read, and learn the lesson.

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By Winifred Graham. *Author of "Through the Valley," "Six First-Class Passengers," etc.*

CHAPTER XXI.

Life is Thorny, and Youth is Vain.

When Quamina can be quieted and her fears calmed, the truth is gradually drawn from her. She has seen a man in a black mask prowling on his hands and knees in the bushes round the house. She leant out of her window and screamed, whereupon he sprang on to a horse, and galloped up the hill like a madman.

Quamina cannot be persuaded it is not the devil himself haunting their domain, and is petrified with terror for the rest of the evening.

"I should feel inclined to put the masked man down to Quamina's vivid imagination," declares Eleanor, "if you had not personally encountered him, Carol. He is like a sort of 'troll,' one of Ibsen's 'helpers and servers.'"

Quinton has given Eleanor "The Master Builder" to read, himself being a believer in the strange theory of will power. He is much upset by Quamina's story, bewildered at the mystery shrouding this evil demon. His life is becoming a purgatory on earth; he goes in daily dread of some fresh disaster. He says little to Eleanor, but she notices he does not sit out in the verandah, preferring the shelter of four walls, as if in mortal fear of something.

"Does he picture a phantom shooting in the dark?" she wonders.

She offers to sing, but he silences her with a petulant movement and gruff word. He is not in the mood for music. The loaded revolver he always keeps in his room is brought down and laid beside him as he smokes and reads.

Eleanor is grieved to see him so unhinged. It is a pitiable thing when a man loses his pluck, and the woman must play the part of consoler and encourager.

The following morning, to her surprise, Quinton seems no less frightened than the previous night. He refuses to go out, and sits in moody silence or paces the room—both equally trying to the patient Eleanor. At last the idea seizes her that if she shows daring and goes out alone, leaving him to brood in solitude, it may spur Quinton to rouse himself and cast off his apprehensions. Surely he will not be outdone by a woman!

"I am going for a stroll," she announces calmly.

"Oh! Are you?"

His lips twitch nervously. He does not volunteer to accompany her.

She takes up a large shady hat, and winds a long white veil over her face.

"Won't you come, too?" she asks mildly.

"No, certainly not, and I think you are very foolhardy to go."

She stares at him in amazement.

"My dear boy, are we to stay in for ever because of old Quamina and her ugly sayings? If the devil is coming for me, he'll come in whether I hide or not; besides, I do not believe in devils!"

"No, but living assassins, modern highwaymen, who scour the country to shed blood, seeking whom they may devour. If you take my advice you will stay safely indoors."

But, for the sake of example, Eleanor shakes her head. If she gives in to him now their life will be one of cowering seclusion. There is something convincing in the light of day that drives from her heart all qualms and misgivings.

"I see no reason why we should not walk abroad just the same as Elizabeth or any other person. You were only attacked once, and that was at night. Look, for instance, at the white woman on the charger. She was alone. I don't think even a highwayman, though, would tackle her," with a low laugh.

"She'd be a pretty good handful for anybody. I could imagine her mesmerising a lion with those eyes. I have no doubt she is a crack shot, too, from the bold way she carried her gun. She was a regular amazon."

"You forget I have never seen the white stranger you allude to."

"Of course not. She passed when you were looking for the dog on that unfortunate day. Well, good-bye for the present, dear. Take care of yourself, and if you like to come and meet me I shall be delighted."

She leaves the house singing, hoping her bravado will have the effect of re-assuring Carol.

As she goes he flings his book on the ground, stretching out his arms like a caged bird beating its wings against the bars.

"It can't last much longer," he hisses between his teeth; "it *won't* last much longer. Thank goodness I can see the end."

Eleanor's mind is so full of thought that she does not heed the direction in which her steps turn. She walks like one in a dream, busy with her own thoughts. A thousand ideas flit through her brain. She lives over her miserable past. Even the early days at Copthorne return vividly. She is a merry child swinging on a gate; a lazy girl lolling on a hayrick; a frivolous wife, sporting her gay attire in the Brussels Bois; a weary woman sighing at her lot in the house on Richmond Terrace; and then the realisation of the

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present rushes over her, and she starts as if suddenly awaking from sleep.

There are steps at her side; she turns, remembering Carol's warning.

Elizabeth Kachin stands before her, they are face to face.

From sheer force of habit Eleanor stretches out her hand in greeting, but draws it back sharply, gathering her scattered wits together. There is a cold look in Elizabeth's eyes. Eleanor shivers though the sun scorches, for the frosts of sin are very bitter. Mrs. Kachin averts her head, and passes her without a word. Little Tombo, who is following in the rear, runs up and raises his face for a kiss; but his mother calls to him quickly, while Eleanor pushes him away. "Why is she angry with me?" he asks Elizabeth; "why doesn't she come and see us now?"

Eleanor hears the words. They cut deeper than an assassin's knife. Carol was right. Retribution is on the road, waiting to devour her body and soul. She paces on with bent head, the hot blood in her cheeks, and a lump in her throat.

A third shadow crosses her path, this time it is Big Tombo. Her eyes meet his fearlessly. He bares his head, bows low, and Eleanor smiles sadly.

"Men are kinder than women," she thinks, as she wanders on. "They judge less harshly. When their companions sin they do not cast them out to sink lower in the mire, they give them a hand, instead of a kick! But women take upon themselves to dash their sisters with cruel force upon the stones."

It was good to be alone with her sorrow, her shame.

She breathed a prayer from the depths of her soul—a wordless invocation. She is close to the jungle now, and the pleasant shade of the foliage cool her feverish brain.

She steps fearlessly into the thick undergrowth. Then pauses, for the sound of a horse attracts her attention. It is the heavy tread of the huge charger, on which that handsome white stranger, gun in hand, is seeking prey.

Eleanor watches the flash of those wonderful eyes, there is something unholy, devilish, in their unusual splendour. Her full red lips are drawn in and compressed.

She raises her gun, and before Eleanor can cry out, the woman has fired!

The bullet whizzes past her head, for a moment her heart stops beating, the narrow escape fills her with horror!

She fancies the stranger saw her before she pulled the trigger, and let off her gun out of sheer devilment, to show her accuracy.

But scarcely has she recovered from the fright than a second report is heard from the bushes close by, and the great charger, on which this reckless sportswoman is seated, falls dead beneath her. She rolls off the saddle, and stands like a fury over the body.

"What villain has killed my horse?" she cries aloud, in a deep voice, which even in its anger sounds strangely fascinating, despite the masculine slang.

Eleanor rushes forward.

"The unseen hand!" she exclaims, hardly knowing what she says.

"How do you mean?" asks the tall woman.

"Some one shot from the bushes; didn't you see? First of all you nearly hit me; it was the closest shave I ever had, and immediately your horse fell——"

"I'll soon find out who has been making a target of me," muttered the stranger.

So saying, she fires recklessly into the bushes; but there is no sound, no cry.

Eleanor watches this wild creature curiously. Surely she will apologise for nearly killing her through inexcusable carelessness.

But she says no word; only watches the smoke rise, and anathematises the fate that has slain a useful beast.

Eleanor forgets her own grievance, and sympathises with the stranger's loss.

"It could not have been done intentionally," she declares.

"I don't believe in chance; it was a dead aim, depend upon it."

Eleanor's eyes expand at this remark.

"Who are you?" she asks. "What is your name?"

"I am a woman," replies the other, with a mocking smile; "my name is Paulina."

She shows no wish to be acquainted with Eleanor's identity.

"What will you do without your horse?"

"Get another, of course."

"But now?"

"Walk."

"Then you live in these parts? I hope in the future you will be more careful how you shoot at random. It would not have been very pleasant for either of us if you had hit me."

"What are you doing walking about by yourself?"

Eleanor looks up and laughs.

"Not risking other people's lives, at any rate."

"I wish I could unravel the mystery of my unknown assailant! Have you any idea who watches your movements and revenges himself on my carelessness?"

A new light flashes across Eleanor at these words. This weird adventure becomes more interesting and amazing at Paulina's suggestion.

"I don't understand you."

"All the better, perhaps."

The abrupt answer startles Eleanor, a puzzled look creeps over her face.

"Why can't you say what you mean?" she asks hotly, looking at Paulina with sudden dislike and repugnance.

The stranger laughs, shoulders her gun, and turns away.

"Where would you have been now," she cries in parting, "if I had shot you down by mistake like a jungle fowl?"

There is a taunting sneer in the words.

A hateful thought steals into Eleanor's mind. This woman, who swears and treats her with such abominable coolness, knows something of her past or present, possibly from Elizabeth, with whom she may be acquainted. This last remark is an insinuation of her unfitness to die, and that her soul is ripe for perdition. The implied slur gradually increases and exaggerates itself in Eleanor's brain, sensitive to a degree. She sees in it a deliberate insult, and following Paulina, she demands:

"Before you go, please apologise for your carelessness. I am not accustomed to be made a mark of, either for bullets or jests."

Paulina stops, and looks her up and down in a manner that makes Eleanor feel like a pigmy facing a giant.

She takes out a cigarette, places it between her teeth, and hands her case to Eleanor.

"Have one?" she asks, with *insouciance*. Eleanor is staggered. She does not know whether to take this as a fresh slight or a very lame apology.

Faint pulses of quivering sunbeams glance through the trees, playing round the dead body of Paulina's horse. The old oaks rear their heads to a sky of purest turquoise, but Eleanor has no heart to notice the beautiful aerial effects. She is wondering if the proffered cigarette is meant as an olive branch or otherwise.

She gazes in mute disgust.

"Have you never seen a weed before?" asks Paulina vivaciously. "You are the type of woman, I suppose, who sits at home and arranges flowers, very artistically no doubt. You would pose in limp gowns of gauzy drapery, like a pictured saint, and expect your husband or your lovers to grovel and worship. But you are dangerously near to the borderland separating the sublime from the ridiculous. You expect *me* to apologise for a shot at random, which cost a valuable horse its life. Some savage black who worships your fair form at a distance, most likely paid it back with interest."

"You are a very vulgar woman," exclaimed Eleanor. "I hope I shall never see you again."

"Don't use that word 'vulgar,'" she replies, "it's so low class."

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"You don't mind what you say to me because I am alone and unprotected," cries Eleanor with almost childish petulance, the tears glistening in her angry eyes. "If Carol was here, he would defend me."

"Carol," she laughs, "who is the staunch and gallant Carol?"

But Eleanor will not answer; she feels desperately affronted, and turns away.

The women walk in opposite directions; the day is dying.

"Well! you are back safely; any adventures?" asks Quinton, as she enters the house pale and weary.

Eleanor sinks into a chair, slowly unwinds her veil, and flings her hat impatiently upon the sofa. She is so seriously put out, that for the moment she dares not trust herself to speak.

"Anything the matter, eh?"

Eleanor clears her throat.

"Yes."

Quinton sits bolt upright from his lounging attitude.

"What?" he says, staring at her intently.

Then she recounts her scene with Paulina, word for word, while Quinton listens breathlessly.

"Her horse *shot from under her?*" he cries, as if that is of far more importance than Eleanor's narrow escape.

"Yes, dear, wasn't it awful? It might have been you or me! I do believe the masked man is on the warpath, only he went for *her* this time instead. It may be a lunatic, for every act seems so perfectly motiveless."

"I told you not to venture out," he says, his face reddening with annoyance. "You *would* go against my wishes, and suffered for it accordingly. The idea of getting into conversation, and actually deigning to quarrel with a stranger. It was most humiliating and lowering. Another time if you meet this 'Paulina,' as you call the white amazon, kindly avoid her. This merely confirms me in the conviction which has grown upon me lately, that this place is no longer fit for us to dwell in. I, for one, am sick of it, and long for a taste of clubdom and life again."

"Oh! Carol!" she exclaims, and the words are wrung from her like a sharp cry.

"Don't look so absurdly miserable, my dear," he says hastily, dreading a scene with all the shrinking of his cowardly nature. "I won't say anything to vex you again. I was only cross; forgive me."

Eleanor's heart goes out to him with all the old yearning tenderness.

Forgive him! Why, she would forgive Carol anything—he is her all. She falls on her knees at his side, and draws down his face for a kiss.

As she does so, the sound of a loud, rich, stirring voice, swelling out on the evening air, reaches them. They exchange hurried glances, start to their feet, and look cautiously out.

It is "Paulina," swaggering down the hill with a devil-may-care mien, her gun still over her shoulder, her hands in her pockets.

They catch the words, which ring full and clear:

"And constancy lives in realms above,
And life is thorny and youth is vain;
And to be wroth with one we love
Doth work like madness in the brain."

"She is like a 'troll,'" murmurs Eleanor, "shrieking in the night."

"A magnificent creature," says Carol. "Quite a picture!"

His eyes are riveted on the retreating form!

CHAPTER XXII.

By a route obscure and lonely,
Haunted by ill angels only.—E. A. Poe.

Eleanor is taking her siesta, wrapt in dreams of Carol and love. No thought of evil disturbs her rest, for to-day the clouds seem to have blown over. Carol has been tender and adoring as of old, he speaks no more of the dreaded uprooting, but is peaceful and content. Yet while she lies in fancy-land—asleep—she cannot see him in the room below, a look of excitement on his face while he writes with feverish haste on a large sheet of flimsy paper.

The words reel rapidly off his quill, he never pauses, and his eyes are aglow with the fire of energy.

Quamina, who has been in the verandah, enters with a tray of cooling drinks and places them by his elbow. She has never seen the Sahib writing before, she did not know he could hold a pen, and his engrossed attitude awakes her curiosity and suspicion. He does not hear her come in till she puts the glasses beside him, then he pushes them away and tells her to go.

Quamina steals across the room.

Why is the Sahib writing? It is not his way. His quill flies like a thing possessed across the paper, and when he pauses it is to wipe the drops of perspiration from his heated brow.

"This is the Sahib's hour for sleep," thinks Quamina. "It is a secret message that he writes at such a time, when his wife is absent, dreaming in the other room." She steals into the verandah and watches. A sudden idea comes to her ignorant mind, which, as she turns it over in her brain, amounts to a firm conviction.

"The Sahib is making a compact with the devil. He is frightened of that tall spirit in the black mask, and is coming to terms with him. Maybe he will offer his house and his servants, his wife even, to be himself released from the terror of that grim presence."

Quamina shakes from head to foot. Her white teeth rattle. Surely the Sahib's face is taking the likeness of the Evil one, as he sits alone, or why does a sinister smile flit across his lips, while he perpetually pauses to listen, and look nervously towards the door? Once he rises, opens it, standing a moment, looking towards Eleanor's room. But there is no sound, and he returns to his desk reassured.

Finally the letter ends. He folds it carefully, looking at the dashing signature with some pride. He takes up a red seal, strikes a light, and drops a huge round of burning wax upon the envelope.

"The deed is done," thinks trembling Quamina; "the devil has been written to. He will scan those hasty words in his unholy abode, and bargain with the Sahib, till an arrangement shall be made."

Her suspicions increase as Quinton, listening once more at the door, snatches up a hat with a guilty air, creeping out into the broiling sun.

Quamina by this time is wild with curiosity, and as Carol hastens down the hill, the letter in his hand, she follows stealthily at a discreet distance.

"Perhaps he will give it himself to the devil. Ah, the poor Sahib!" she mutters.

Quinton never pauses till he is out of sight of the bungalow; then turning to his right he places the sealed envelope in a crevice of a rock, hidden from sight.

Quamina watches wonderingly the post-box of the devil.

She marks the spot in her mind's eye, and fearing detection hurries back unobserved.

For the rest of the day she thinks of nothing but the Sahib's letter, and its strange hiding place. She pictures the "Nats" surrounding the spot, and bearing it in triumph to their chief.

She watches her master curiously, but by no sign does he reveal that anything unusual has occurred, save that he laughs more frequently, and seems as light-hearted and high-spirited as a boy.

"Maybe he has paid the devil off," Quamina surmises.

Captain Stevenson and Major Short ride over, much to Eleanor's delight, who enjoys a chat with the outer world as keenly as Carol.

She longs once again to hear Major Short's melodious voice, and bringing her guitar, begs for "Mandalay."

But he shakes his head.

"I shall tire you of the one song," he declares.

"Not when it is the favourite," she protests. "Only four

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lines, if you will, or a single bar of the tune. I love the sad refrain."

He follows her on to the verandah. Quinton and Captain Stevenson are talking and smoking within.

They catch the words between the pauses in their conversation.

"Ship me somewhere east of Suez, where the best is like the worst,
Where there ain't no ten Commandments, and a man can raise a thirst.
For the temple bells are callin', and it's there that I would be,
By the old Moulmein Pagoda, lookin' lazy at the sea."

"Dreadful morals!" laughs Captain Stevenson.

"Do *you* love the East?" asks Eleanor, as Major Short lays aside the guitar.

"Yes, well enough, but I get terribly homesick at times. I long to draw round a huge log fire in the old hall at home on a still winter's evening, with the shutters shut and the curtains drawn, and my feet on the fender. No one has any conception of the bliss of those long, luxurious hours over the flame and the coal. Those who have it don't appreciate it. Imagine yourself nipped by a biting frost coming suddenly in to such a scene of warmth and ease, to lose yourself in the depths of an enormous spring chair, and gaze in that wilderness of red, while the wood crackles, and blue flickers up like a phantom light in the blazing scarlet. It is many years since I passed a good old English Christmas, with plum-pudding and bells chiming over the snow. Bah! I cannot endure to think of it—I get so green with envy."

"I am afraid I never cared for the winter. The sun is better than artificial warmth—the East is rosier than the fireside."

"But you must yearn sometimes to get home to your family and friends. Have you no mother you long to kiss—no father who is pining for a sight of his daughter's smile, and old chums waiting to greet you with a hearty handshake and cheery welcome."

Eleanor shakes her head mournfully—her large, soft eyes look sad and wistful—she is no hypocrite—she never could pretend.

"No; England is all a blank. My whole interest in life is centred in my husband."

Involuntarily a pang of pity shoots through the man's heart. He hardly knows why, since she is so happy in Quinton's love.

He mistrusts him, for men are quicker in reading each other than a woman blinded by skin-deep fascination.

Many a trusting heart has been won by the pink light from a lamp falling on a handsome profile, by the faultless cut of a frock coat, or by a good seat on horseback.

Poor little Eleanor! Poor humanity!

"It is a mistake to rely too much on love," says Major Short. "It sometimes fails us, and then——"

He pauses, seeing the look of pain upon Eleanor's face.

"I was speaking of myself," he adds half apologetically. "Look for instance, at my parents, at home in the old country. What good is their affection now? What use am I to them, stuck here in India? True, we correspond, but letters give us no sight of the familiar face, no kiss from the lips that may be dead and cold before we meet again. But love, Mrs. Quinton, is over for ever in my life, it is a memory alone, a dream of the silent past."

Eleanor's eyes are deeply sympathetic; she is a woman to inspire confidence.

Major Short continues, though he is surprised at himself for so doing:

"Yes, I was in love once, it was the one sincere and overruling passion of my life." He lowers his voice as he speaks. "You brought it back to me when you said that all your interests were centred in your husband."

He holds out a little case to Eleanor.

"I alway carry this about with me; it is her portrait. Look at it."

Eleanor opens the case reverently, and gazes with a certain awe at the beautiful face within. She fancies there is a mystery in the far-away expression of the woman's eyes. But, after all, it is only the mystery of death.

"That picture was taken after she knew she must die,' he says. "They would not let me marry her then."

His eyes are lowered; Eleanor fancies they are moist.

"Fate is very cruel," she murmurs.

"Yes, when the poetry of existence turns to prose, all the light dies out. I can never love again. Sentiment to me now is as a shallow stream."

Quamina appears with the tray of drinks again. Her eyes looks wild; she shambles along; her knees knock together.

"What is the matter with that woman?" asks Major Short, as she staggers away.

"She is frightfully superstitious, and some nights ago she thought the devil had come for Carol, and she has never been the same since. She crouches about like a creature demented. Sometimes I fancy she must be insane."

Major Short quotes from Pope with a dry smile:

"Lo! the poor Indian, whose untutored mind,
Sees God in clouds, or hears Him in the wind."

"But there is sense in that," Eleanor declares. "God is in all Nature; every blade of grass manifests Him."

Then she remembers she is still clasping that small case, and looks down once more on the expressive features of the beautiful woman.

"Talking of death—and love," she says slowly, harping back to the old subject, "I often wonder what I should do if anything happened to Carol. Imagine me here, in a strange country, alone, friendless! What if he sickened with fever, or was wounded by an enemy, or if he died?" A shudder of apprehension runs over.

"I hope you will never call yourself friendless while we—while I am within your reach. I have suffered myself; I know what sorrow is. Should you ever be in any trouble, Mrs. Quinton, or need a helping hand, remember you can rely on me."

Eleanor looks at him with that serious and admiring glance of hers, expressive of greater gratitude and deeper wonder than any words.

"You are *very* good," she says at length. "If all men were so kind, I think women would be better and place surer trust in them."

Two large trees in front of the verandah, with bending boughs, meet and make an archway of feathery foliage, in which the birds lodge. Eleanor's eyes turn to the drooping green, and then to the distant hills. She has a vague foreshadowing of coming evil. She sees the oxen yoked together, dragging their loads; she wonders if they are happier after all than mortals like Major Short and herself. Two of these patient animals are drawing a Burmese public carriage, with a black boy looking out of the quaint covering, like a little house on two wheels. They pause to drink in the Irrawaddy; she sighs to think how sadly they need refreshment. In the thatched huts and tall palms, Eleanor pictures Copthorne—it rises as a mirage—till Major Short dispels it by some casual remark. He notices her listlessness, for she starts as he speaks.

"Forgive me," she says, smiling wanly, "but I was miles away."

"How interesting. May I not follow you? What did you see?"

"I conjured up a farm-house and green English lanes, gold cornfields, rustic reapers, and honest workers. They were getting in the harvest."

Captain Stevenson's cheery voice, and Quinton's musical laugh interrupts the conversation as they join Eleanor and Major Short.

"It is time we were making tracks. What do you say, Short?"

"I suppose so, but it is always hard to tear oneself away from pleasant companions."

"When shall we meet again?" asks Eleanor gaily. "Can't we arrange a day next week? Ride over in the cool of the morning to breakfast."

"Thanks—delighted. There is a peculiar fascination in your charming home and hearty welcome."

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Quinton smiles enigmatically, as he watches them ride away.

Eleanor slips her hand in his.

"You seemed very merry to-day," she says. "They quite enlivened us, didn't they, Carol?"

"Yes; it certainly makes a difference having somebody to speak to. Don't you notice it, dear?"

He looks down at her steadfastly, and for the moment Eleanor's expression turns the unscrupulous man dizzy with a vague sensation nearly approaching regret.

He sees in her eyes the overflowing of a heart whose passionate adoration amounts to idolatry.

He is touched and softened. He presses her lips, though they no longer thrill him, and she in her mute worship cannot define the change.

Her love, he thinks, so freely given, so utterly beyond control, is after all a pitiable spectacle.

He scrutinises her fair face critically; it seems insipid to him now. Its pale spirituality, which once set his brain on fire, appears characterless. The classical features, exquisitely moulded, lack power. The sweet mouth has a wan droop, as if sighing for ungranted kisses.

"Sometimes, Carol," she says at last, "I fancy you are tiring of me." She only speaks for him to contradict.

"My darling, what an absurd notion to get into that pretty little head of yours! Occasionally it is a little slow here for us both."

"That is only since you grew nervous. Of course, the days are long if you will stay indoors doing nothing."

"Yes, you are quite right," he answers, somewhat to Eleanor's surprise. "It *is* foolish, and unnecessary. Now you won't grumble, my pet, if I go for a long day's sport to-morrow. It will do me all the good in the world, some excitement and exercise. I have been getting dreadfully grumpy and cross."

"How early shall you start?"

"Oh, first thing. I assure you, Eleanor, I am quite looking forward to it. I can't have been very well lately, and that accounts for my apparent prostration and uncalled-for nervousness. There is nothing really to fear, and you can make your mind quite easy about me."

These reassuring words delight Eleanor, for as long as Carol is happy and satisfied, her joy is intense.

As they talk Quamina is crouching under the broad steps that lead down from the verandah; her eyes gaze in the direction of that mysterious rock hidden from sight.

She wonders if the devil has yet come for the Sahib's message. Her soul is torn by curiosity and fear. She longs to know, and if the strange letter still lies in the crevice untouched, herself to break the seal and try to decipher the words.

It is a tremendous temptation, yet as she rises with a bold resolve and creeps along the moonlit path, she suffers mortal dread, momentarily expecting to encounter some supernatural apparition. She turns out of sight of the bungalow, with its cheerful lights, and reaches the rock, on which the moonbeams play. A ray of light lies across the crevice in which the Sahib deposited his epistle.

With set teeth, and frantically beating heart, Quamina forces her skinny arm into the hole, murmuring prayers as she gropes and fumbles.

Then staggers back with a low moan, and flees from the unholy spot. The devil has been! The letter is *gone!*

(To be continued.)

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ALCOHOLISM AND OBESITY.

It is often rashly asserted that drunkenness is uncommon on the European Continent, and that, in particular, it is a rare vice in France. Certain medical therapeutists and specialistic scientists have, however, recently furnished some suggestive statistics which flatly contradict the cherished beliefs of those who have persistently proclaimed the sobriety of the French people. Dr. Lancereaux, at the French Academy of Medicine, having made a special study of the subject, declares that in his extensive hospital practice out of twenty patients ten are, on an average, suffering from some form of alcoholic poisoning—women being responsible for a large proportion of the enormous consumption of alcohol thus indicated. The learned doctor sums up the results on the population at large as representing a mortality greater than that caused by the greatest epidemics, the ruin of labour, and—what is already startlingly evident in France—the steady diminution of the very population of the country. Other authorities, again, assert that with the annual increase in the consumption of spirits, to the extent of nearly 500,000 gallons in various liquors, there has been a corresponding increase of corpulence. This appears to make alcohol responsible for the troublesome and sometimes dangerous increase of unhealthy adipose tissue on the strength of the somewhat slipshod theory of the affinity of alcohol for oxygen in the system. It is certainly worthy of note that some of the most eminent authorities on the Continent and in America absolutely debar the corpulent from drinking alcohol in any shape or form, while on the other hand one of the most prominent and successful specialists in England boldly and flatly contradicts, on this point, his professional brethren. He permits those undergoing his treatment to drink the spirits of their choice—although he does not advocate the use of these beverages. The result of his experiments is that he can reduce a person's weight from 3lb. to 6lb. in a week, although the patient may drink alcohol even to excess; nor will any extra decrease in weight be experienced by a restriction of the amount of drink consumed. His aim is to attack corpulence at its very root, and to achieve this he does not approve of such a drastic measure as the sudden and indiscriminate stoppage of a person's accustomed spirituous drink; for there are many who have so habitually used themselves to their "dram" that its prohibition is unquestionably a great hardship, if not actually dangerous. Again, he takes exception to the action of the majority of specialists in dealing with obesity, in prescribing a limited diet. To this he takes exception on the very reasonable ground (to quote from his clever 256-paged book, entitled "Corpulency, and the Cure," by F. C. Russell, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C.), that with the reduction of fat by his process, the most unhealthy portion of this excess tissue, such as those which clog the vital organs, begin to waste first, and, as a consequence, the entire system becomes healthier within the first twenty-four hours of the treatment. Then immediately the patient begins to be exhilarated by such symptoms as the freedom of breathing, the stronger and steadier action of the heart, the feeling of lightness, the absence of the sense of oppression—each organ performing its duty with increased regularity. He finds himself aroused suddenly from a lethargic heaviness and morbid drowsiness which have probably lasted for years; he feels, as it were, born anew, and instantly becomes more active and buoyant, both in body and mind—all of which pleasurable sensations are naturally accompanied by an increase of appetite. It is not necessary to be a scientist or a medical expert to adopt the common sense view of these matters. "Would you, then," argues Mr. Russell, "in the case of a person who for years, perhaps, has never known what a healthy appetite means, deprive him of food when Nature appealingly holds forth her hands, literally begging for it? No! those who reduce fat by starvation pay for their folly at usurers' interest when meeting the bills drawn against them on the Bank of Longevity. Let other specialists prescribe this; I will not countenance it," says Mr. Russell. Notwithstanding the increased amount of food taken daily, the weight, under the operation of his system, is steadily reduced, to which unerring testimony is given by the weighing-machine. The painstaking research and the marvellous success of the author of the above-named work justify us in arriving at the conclusion that his system may be followed with absolute confidence. His success is all the more remarkable because the whole secret consists in the use of a few herbal roots and a simple vegetable acid. We believe it is the only system of reducing obesity—and it is a very pleasant system—which is certain in its results and brings no after-penalties. We commend his book to our readers. It may be obtained post free by sending six penny stamps to Mr. Russell at the address already given.—*Brighton Examiner.*

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